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# FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

### A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH; OR, A BRAVE BOY'S START IN LIFE.

*By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



The boy ducked nimbly and then tackled the ruffian low down, football fashion. The consequence was the fellow lost his balance and measured his length upon the ground, while the valise, containing the stolen property, went flying several feet away.



# Fame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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# A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH:

OR,

## A Brave Boy's Start in Life.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

### CHAPTER I.

#### IN WHICH FRED KING TAKES ANNIE MARSH'S PART.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Moses Wyse, to beat that little fellow so cruelly!" cried pretty Annie Marsh, indignantly, her bright blue eyes flashing a scornful look at a big, loutish boy, who held a timid-looking lad of eleven years by the ear, while he clouted him about the head with his disengaged hand.

"I ain't hurtin' him," replied the assailant, in a shame-faced way. "Jest teachin' him manners. The little imp sassed me."

"Please, miss, I didn't," blubbered the boy, whose name was Eddie Foster, the tears oozing in channels down his coal-begrimed features, for he was a slate-picker in the Black Diamond breaker hard by.

"You little liar!" gritted Moses, savagely, giving the boy's jacket-collar a twist, which nearly strangled him.

"Let him go!" ordered the sweet-faced girl, peremptorily.

Reluctantly Moses Wyse released his grip, and the little slate-picker, taking advantage of the fact, sprang away and disappeared quickly around the great culm heap, which was a massive pile of coal dust covering acres of ground, and stretching down to the brink of the beautiful Sus-

quehanna River, on the bank of which this incident occurred.

Moses Wyse was the son of Jake Wyse, the cracker boss of the Black Diamond colliery, and a cruel ogre in the eyes of all the little boys whose unhappy fate sent them to work in the screen-room.

Young Wyse had something of his father's disposition.

He loved to torture and bullyrag any one whom his hulking stature and scowling face intimidated.

And when he couldn't find a human object to practice upon, he transferred his attention to the dogs and cats, and even the birds, of the neighborhood.

As might be expected, he was a rank coward at heart.

If the person who excited his ill will was able to resist his aggression he bided his time and endeavored to get back at them in a treacherous and underhanded manner.

And this young rascal had the nerve to think he was a fit mate to associate with Annie Marsh, daughter of John Marsh, engineer of the Black Diamond colliery, and the belle of the small mining village which formed a suburb of the thriving city of Wilkesbarre, on the banks of the Susquehanna River.

He admired Annie, in his selfish way, because she was an uncommonly pretty girl, but he didn't like her way of dealing with such a disposition as was his.



"Well," he growled, sullenly, "I've let him go, and now you'll let me see you home, won't you?"

He spoke the words eagerly, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, like some animal contemplating a delicious morsel.

"No, I won't."

The refusal was short, sharp and to the point.

Annie had no use for Moses Wyse, and she wanted him to understand that particular fact.

The boy's face turned a livid, unhealthy color, for her words stung him.

"You wouldn't say that to Fred King," he snarled, in an ugly tone, while his eyes blazed with a jealous fury, "and he's only a common engineer's helper, while I——"

"Stop!" she exclaimed, with a flash of her eye which, for a moment, disconcerted him. "You shan't say a word against him in my presence. You wouldn't dare do it before his face."

"Yah!" he hissed, vindictively. "I hate him!"

"Then you're the only one in the village who does," she retorted, spiritedly.

"Am I?"

"Yes. Why do you dislike him? Hasn't he always treated you fairly?"

"No, he hasn't."

"Who saved you from the fangs of Anderson's dog a few months ago?"

"I don't care. I hate him because he likes you, and you walk with him and give me the cold shake. You think I ain't got no feelin's. You think you kin walk over me and wipe it in. But you can't, I tell you. I won't stand it. I'll git even with him, and mebbe with you, too, ef you don't look out."

He shook his burly head, menacingly, like a wild bull in a Spanish arena when on the point of charging upon the toreador.

Annie tossed her head with a look of supreme contempt.

Moses noticed the action, and it roused all the evil that was in him.

He took a step toward her and grasped her by the wrist.

"Do you know I've a good mind to throw you into the river?" he hissed.

There was such a malevolent intensity in his words that the girl shrank back in spite of her natural courage.

He was quick to perceive the effect he had produced, and an uncontrollable desire to follow up his advantage took possession of him.

A few moments before he had been foiled by her in his attempt to play the bully with little Eddie Foster.

Now he thought she was afraid of him and he would get square with her since she had refused to walk up the street with him.

The time and circumstances seemed to be propitious.

They were alone together on the bank of the Susquehanna.

Night was falling, and there was little fear of interruption, for the machinery was silent in the almost deserted colliery, a few hundred feet away.

A few minutes ago a friendly word from the girl would have thrilled his hidebound nature, now it was all different.

She had contemptuously refused his request.

And—he knew she liked Fred King, and would be proud to let that boy, even in his oil-soaked and cinder-stained overalls and jumper, see her on her road to her father's cottage.

The very thought of such a thing was enough to make Moses Wyse furious.

"Do you know, I'd just as lief do somethin' to git square with you as not," he cried, glaring down into her face. "I like you better'n King ever thought of, but I can't stand for you to ride a high horse with me. The more I like you the more I kin hate you, too. If you won't be seen with me, I'll swear you shan't with him. I'll kill him first, and you, too!"

"Moses Wyse, how dare you!" cried the white-faced girl, struggling to free her wrist from his viselike grip.

"Oh, I dare, all right!" he gritted, with a sardonic chuckle.

"You're a coward, and I'll never notice you again as long as I live!"

"You think you won't," he snarled. "You'll promise right now to let me go home with you and treat me better in the future or——"

He made a significant gesture toward the swiftly rolling water.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she replied, desperately.

"Yes, you will!" he cried, forcing her backward.

"Let me go, Moses Wyse!"

"When you answer the way I want."

He seized her other wrist and the now frightened girl uttered a shrill scream.

"Hang it! what did you do that for?" he snarled. "Do you want me to choke you?"

Annie had never seen him in such a mood before.

He made no effort now to disguise the true instincts of his evil nature.

The mask was off, and she saw him as he really was—a thoroughly unprincipled young rascal.

"Moses Wyse, are you mad?"

"Mebbe I am. And ef I am it's all 'cause of you."

"My father will make you feel sorry for this," she said.

"Yah! My old man won't let him touch me."

"Let me go!"

"Will you do as I want you to?"

"No!"

"Then I'll——"

"You'll do what, Moses Wyse?" said a clear, strong voice in his ear, as a firm hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Fred King!" cried Annie, with a little shriek of delight.

"You!" gritted the cracker boss's son, the fire of a sullen hatred blazing in his eyes.

"Yes. And jest you let Annie Marsh alone."

"And supposin' I won't?" retorted Moses, ferociously.

"If you won't, I'll make you!" replied the stalwart youth,



whose handsome features were streaked with evidences of his calling.

It was an intense moment as the two boys faced each other.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN WHICH MOSES WYSE GETS THE WORST OF IT.

Fred King was one of nature's young noblemen—a diamond in the rough.

He was sixteen years of age, strong, healthy and every inch the man, from the crown of his curly brown head to the soles of his well-worn shoes.

All he needed was the polish afforded by education and contact with good society.

At the early age of ten the sudden death of his father in the mines forced him to go to work as a slate-picker in the dense, dusty atmosphere of the Black Diamond breaker, where for many months he spent long hours daily, astride of a narrow chute, sorting the slate from the coal, as both descended in continuous streams from the massive screens through which they had been sifted in fragments.

His companions then had been boys of his own age, many of whom were prematurely stunted and eventually broken in health by the life they were compelled to lead.

But Fred survived this terrible period in his young career, though he more than once narrowly escaped the awful fate which had befallen more than one of the weaker boys, of being swept from the chute into the pockets—receptacles into which the coal, when freed from all impurities, ran prior to being loaded into the railroad cars for transportation to the market.

King was such a good-natured, sunny-faced lad that he became a general favorite, not only at the Black Diamond colliery, but throughout the little mining village as well, and when his mother died, leaving him an orphan, he did not care to leave the place.

After a time, the engineer, who had taken a great fancy to him, managed to have him assigned to the furnace-room as a sort of general helper.

Here he was employed to do the lowest and dirtiest work in the place—to wheel the refuse to the cinder heap, then to scrape the clinkers and scale from inside of the boilers on Sundays and such other days when the engines were shut down.

Recently he had been promoted to the engine-room, where he oiled the cups, cleaned the brass and other parts of the machinery, and attended to such other duties as the job called for.

John Marsh, the engineer, began to instruct him in all the mysteries of the big engine which ran the machinery of the colliery.

He proposed to make the boy an able assistant and, eventually, a first-class engineer like himself.

It was an exceptional opportunity which was thus pre-

sented to Fred to forge his way to the front in a splendid calling.

Fred King had become acquainted with Annie Marsh when he first went into the boiler-room, and that acquaintance had steadily ripened, with John Marsh's approval, until the young people got upon a very cordial footing.

The boy was always welcomed at the Marsh cottage, for he was a modest fellow, and never presumed upon the standing he had attained.

"I would give a great deal to have a son like him," Mr. Marsh more than once said to his wife, and the good woman was in full sympathy with this feeling.

Moses Wyse, who persistently tried to force his undesirable attentions on Annie, was, on the contrary, not looked upon with favor by the girl's parents, nor, as we have seen, by Miss Marsh herself.

Therefore, Moses hated Fred, and had registered a vow to do him up at the first opportunity—not fairly and above board, but on the quiet, if he could, for Moses had a wholesome respect for Fred's prowess.

As we have said, the two boys stood face to face that evening on the dusky banks of the Susquehanna, Moses Wyse still holding Annie Marsh by the wrists.

"You'll make me, will you?" snarled Moses, whose anger had made him uncommonly bold.

Fred didn't waste another word upon him, but grabbing his wrists with a grip of steel, made him release the girl.

"I'll kill you!" yelled the young villain, making a furious lunge at Fred, which the boy easily avoided by stepping quickly to one side.

"I don't think you will," answered King, coolly.

"I will! I will, if I die for it!" screamed Moses, livid with passion.

"I wouldn't get so excited if I were you," said the other, placidly.

Moses sprang at him furiously and tried to strike him in the face.

Fred warded off the blow, but made no attempt to retaliate.

His passiveness encouraged the loutish boy to further effort.

He brought his strength into full play, and Fred woke up to the fact that matters were going altogether too far to be pleasant.

"You will have it, eh?"

Smash!

Moses got a straight one in the eye.

For the next minute it was nip and tuck between them, Fred catching a staggering thump on the chest from his enemy's big fist.

Then biff!

Wyse caught it under the chin and his head went back with a jerk.

"Have you had enough?" asked Fred, as Moses put his hands to his jaw and hung back.

The little villain made no reply, his bulging eyes fairly snapping with fury.

Then he suddenly rushed a yard away, stooped down,



picked up a big chunk of slate and let it drive full at Fred's head.

Only the quickest kind of a duck saved the boy from what must have proved a fatal blow.

As it was, one of the sharp corners of the missile tore a jagged wound along the side of his head, from which the blood started freely.

Annie, who had been watching the conflict with anxious eyes, uttered a suppressed scream and ran to Fred.

The cowardly act, however, so angered King that he rushed upon Moses with compressed lips that told how fully aroused he was.

It was thump, biff, smash, thump! for the next minute, and when he let up, young Wyse was reduced to a cowering wreck, and fairly begged for quarter.

"Get out of here!" cried Fred, unmistakably in earnest. "The next time you run up against me that way you'll have to be shovelled into a cart and carried home. Go, do you hear!"

Moses heard, understood, and slunk away like the cur he was, but his black little heart was full of hate and an unquenchable desire to get square with the boy who had so thoroughly humiliated him in the presence of Annie Marsh.

"When I went to the door of the engine-room to get a basin of water to wash up, I heard you scream," said Fred, in explanation of his presence on the scene, as he took one of the girl's hands in his to look at her wrist, chafed by Moses Wyse's rough grasp.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, earnestly; "but, oh, so sorry you have been hurt in my behalf. You are bleeding dreadfully," she added, anxiously. "Can't I do something to stop the blood?"

"It doesn't amount to anythin'," he answered, carelessly.

"I will go with you to the engine-house and bathe and bind it up for you," she said, eagerly.

"Well," he replied, pleased with the concern she showed, "come along."

They walked, hand-in-hand, to the engine-room, like a couple of children, and then he got a basin of warm water and a bar of yellow soap.

He washed the blood out of his hair and from the wound, roughly, and after that removed the grime and oil from his face and dried it with a coarse towel.

After that he submitted to the gentle ministrations of Annie, who thoroughly cleansed the wound and bound it up with his handkerchief.

"There, you look much better now, Fred," she said, smiling into his face.

"Thanks, Annie; that's as good as a doctor could have done."

"You had better go to the druggist and have it properly attended to."

"I will if you'll go along," he bargained, with a cheerful grin.

"Why, of course I will, if you wish me to."

"It's a bargain. Wait till I pull off my workin'-suit and we'll start."

Annie's father had gone home half an hour before, and but for the trouble Fred himself would have been at his lodgings eating supper by this time.

"Mother will certainly be wondering what has become of me," she said, as they started off into the village.

"Then I guess I'd better not keep you," said Fred, regretfully.

"A few minutes more won't make any difference," she replied, lightly.

"How did you come across Moses?" he asked, curiously.

"I caught him beating little Eddie Foster, and it made me so angry that I interfered and made him let the boy go."

"Good for you!" grinned Fred, admiringly.

"Then he wanted to walk home with me," she went on, tossing her head disdainfully. "Just as if I would permit him to do so."

"You don't like him?"

"No, I don't. Haven't I told you so before?"

"I guess you have, and I don't blame you."

"He's a disagreeable, mean-spirited boy," she said, outspokenly. "The idea of him grabbing me by the two wrists and wanting to make me do as he wished. What do you suppose he threatened to do?" she added, indignantly.

"What?"

"Why, throw me into the river."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Fred, somewhat astonished.

"He said he had a good mind to do that, and he spoke earnestly enough to frighten me. When he pushed me back, as if he really intended to carry out his threat, I screamed."

"He's gettin' to be as bad as his father," said Fred. "I was up in the screen-room the other day, and the way Jake Wyse was beatin' the little kids would have made your blood boil. It was bad enough in my time, but it's worse under Jake. He acts like a ravin' demon with those little slate-pickers."

"Poor little fellows, they have a hard time of it," she said, with a shudder.

Then they entered the drugstore, and the druggist fixed Fred up in good shape.

A few minutes later the boy bade Annie good night at the entrance to the lane, a stone's throw from her home, and continued on to his own lodgings.

### CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH A PLOT IS HATCHED AGAINST JOHN MARSH.

"You're a nice-lookin' object, you are!" said Mr. Wyse, Senior, as his hulking son Moses slouched into the house after the mix-up with Fred King.

The Wyse family was at supper, Jake himself being in the act of carving a rather tough steak, while the three little Wysees sat around the board in a state of great expectation, each secretly hoping he would get the biggest piece, and Mrs. Jake was pouring the tea.



"What's happened to yer?" continued the head of the house as Moses flung his cap into a convenient corner and sneaked into his chair.

"Got hurt," replied Moses, ungraciously.

"Yer did, did yer? Well, yer ain't got no bizness to git hurt. I'll see yer in the woodshed after supper."

The significance of the final sentence caused Moses to grow pale.

"Fred King licked me, if you want to know," he said, sullenly.

"Fred King!" snarled Wyse, Senior, with an ominous glitter in his eye. "That whelp!" with a hoarse roar. "I only wish I'd been boss of the screen-room when he worked there!" and Jake wagged his head, forbiddingly. "I'd have taken the hide off him."

From which it may easily be understood that Jake Wyse, for some reason, did not have any great love for Fred King.

"You ought to be big enough to put it all over that hound," went on Mr. Wyse, as he helped his eldest hopeful to the smallest piece of steak.

"Mebbe I am, if I got a fair show."

"Didn't you get a fair show?"

"No, I didn't. He struck me when I wasn't lookin'."

"He did, did he?" snorted Jake, beginning to feel a sort of sympathy for his son. "Give me the partic'lars."

Moses, who knew his father like a book, began to see a gleam of hope ahead, and with the view of turning his parent's anger away from himself, proceeded to give a highly varnished account of the affair down by the river.

Needless to say, he represented himself as the victim of an unprovoked assault.

"And King jumped on you just 'cause you wanted to walk home with that Marsh girl, is that it?"

"That's it, dad."

"If you can't handle him, I'll take the first chance and lick him myself," said Jake Wyse, after swallowing the greater part of a huge cup of tea at a gulp.

"I wish you'd fix him so Annie Marsh would give him the shake."

"Mebbe I will. So she talks to him, does she?"

"Yes, she does," in a tone which would imply that Moses regarded this as a real grievance.

"What do you care? She ain't the only gal in this here village."

"She's the best-lookin', and dresses the nicest, too."

"Yah!" snarled his father. "I ain't got no use for nothin' connected with John Marsh. He's proud and stuck up."

"That's right, Jake," interposed the amiable spouse, with a snap of the eye, "Misses Marsh don't think I'm good enough to 'sociate with."

"Who said so?" roared Jake, glaring at Mrs. Jake, as if he scented fresh fuel for his ill humor to feed upon.

"Well, I heerd so," answered Mrs. Jake, vaguely.

"Those Marshes make me sick," sputtered Jake, as though he was the censor of the village. "They try to make out they're better'n other folks. John Marsh thinks himself too good to drop into the 'Miners' Retreat' for his glass of

beer of a night. Has it brought to his house instead. He told Gummitt, the landlord, the other day, that his house was the curse of the village. That he was making drunkards of honest miners, and takin' the bread out of their families' mouths. I go there reg'larly, and I don't take the bread out'r your nor the kids' mouths, do I, Mrs. Wyse?"

"Oh, dear, no!" Mrs. Jake hastened to reply. "The idea!"

"There!" and Jake brought his hand down on the table, as if he had clinched the argument in the right way.

"Where's my hat?" he asked, as he rose from the table.

"Where you left it, I s'pose," answered Mrs. Jake.

"Where did I leave it?"

"Dunno. Are you goin' out?"

"Yes, I'm goin' out. What did you s'pose when I asked for my hat? That I was goin' to bed?" with some sarcasm. "Here you, Moses, jest you hunt my hat up and be quick 'bout it, or I'll take you out in the woodshed and dust your jacket for you, as I intended."

Moses got a hustle on himself, and was so fortunate as to find his father's hat under his own.

Jake Wyse clapped it on his head, lighted his dirty stump of a pipe and walked out of the door, making a bee-line for the "Miners' Retreat," the eyesore of the mining village.

The cracker boss was an early bird at the dram-shop, and this gave him the opportunity of a long and confidential chat with Gummitt, the proprietor, for whom he had considerable of a liking.

It seems there had been some talk among the better people of the village of requesting Mr. Gummitt, a beetle-browed Englishman, to remove to a more congenial locality, and Gummitt naturally resented this interference with his rights.

He was making money, and didn't want to move.

"You kin lay it all to John Marsh," said Jake Wyse, wagging his head, sagely.

"'E's a wiper," said Gummitt, bringing his fist down upon the bar with a force that set the glasses upon it all of a jingle.

He meant viper, but, unfortunately, Gummitt's language was not of the first order.

"Wot right has 'e to go round settin' people agin me, that's wot I want to know?" asked the Englishman, with a look of virtuous indignation.

"He ain't got no right," said Jake Wyse, pouring out a fresh glass of whiskey for himself and then forgetting to pay for it.

"Of course 'e ain't. If the miners want to come in 'ere for a glass o' beer, or summut stronger, ain't they got the right to? I awsk you?"

"Sure they have."

"It ain't no bizness o' mine if they spend more'n they kin afford over the bar. This 'ere is Hamerica, where ev'ry individool is 'is hown boss. They come in 'ere of their hown haccord, don't they? I don't go hout an' drive 'em hin with a club, do Hi? This bein' a free country I 'ave my rights, too, even hif I did come from the other side, which I hain't ashamed of."



"That's right," agreed Jake, emptying his glass.

"Take another," said Gummitt, pushing the bottle toward him. "Hit won't cost you nothin'. I look on you as a friend. What would you hadwise me to do?"

"If it was me, Gummitt," said Jake, in a confidential whisper, as he poured out another dram, "I'd try and do somethin' to get square with John Marsh."

"Ow kin I do it?" asked the proprietor of the Retreat, looking hard at the cracker boss.

"Are you willin' to try?" said Wyse, regarding the Englishman narrowly.

"Hi'm willin' to do hanythink wot won't get found out."

"If you're game, I'm ready to help you," said Jake, in a low tone. "I've got it in for John Marsh myself, and I'm only waitin' for a chance to put it up to him."

"Hare you?" said the Englishman, eagerly. "Then we'll join 'ands if you say so, hand put 'im hout of bizness hif we kin."

The bargain was struck on the spot and sealed with another drink.

"'Ave you got hany plan?" asked Gummitt.

"I have."

"Wot is it?"

"He's put all of his earnin's into that fine cottage he lives in up the lane. You've seen it, haven't you?"

"Hi 'ave."

"The insurance ran out to-day noon, and the letter he writ to the comp'ny to have it renewed never reached the post-office."

"W'y not?"

"'Cause I got hold of it—see?"

Jake Wyse pulled an envelope out of his pocket, addressed to the William Penn Fire Insurance Co., of Philadelphia, and showed Gummitt the enclosures, an unsigned receipt and a money-order for the amount shown on it."

"He ought to have registered that letter. That's where he was a fool. Now, if his house burns down to-night he'll lose all, with the mortgage standin' agin the land, which will wipe him out."

"But 'is 'ouse hain't likely to burn down to-night," said Gummitt.

"Mebbe not, unless you an' me put a match to it."

Gummitt wasn't so thick he couldn't understand what the cracker boss was driving at, and it took his breath for the moment.

"Hit's a State prison hoffense," he said, in a hushed tone.

"Not unless you get caught."

Gummitt regarded the proposition with some uneasiness.

"Wot hare the chances?" he asked.

"I think it's easy," said Jake, coolly.

"Come into my parlor an' Ill let the old 'ooman wait hon the customers," said Gummitt, leading the way.

With a bottle of whiskey before them they went over the scheme, and, after an hour's confab, came to an agreement to put it into effect that night.

Then the two rascals parted, to meet again at mid-night.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE AMBUSH THAT DIDN'T WORK, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

When Fred King reached his lodgings that evening he found a note from one of his old slate-picker friends, who had got a job in Wilkesbarre, asking him to come and see him that night, if possible.

The boy considered the question while eating his supper, and finally decided to go.

As he passed by the "Miners' Retreat," he observed Moses Wyse and a pal hanging around on the outside of the dram-shop.

The bully saw him and scowled darkly.

Just then an acquaintance of Fred's came along and asked him where he was going.

"To Wilkesbarre," he replied.

"It'll be late before you get back, won't it?" said his friend.

"I guess it will," admitted King, and with that they parted.

Moses, however, had heard the brief conversation.

It was close to one o'clock in the morning when Fred came through the wood on the outskirts of the mining village.

He was whistling merrily to beguile the lonesomeness of his walk.

It was not a very bright night, as there was no moon, and the wind soughed through the leaves and branches.

A timid person wouldn't have relished his surroundings, but Fred was built of sterner stuff, and he plodded along as unconcerned as though he was on a crowded city thoroughfare.

Suddenly something whizzed through the air and whisked his hat from his head as neatly as if sliced off with a knife.

"What's that?" cried the boy, stopping in his tracks and then looking after his hat, which had rolled against the hedge.

Whiz-z-z!

A big chunk of coal almost brushed the boy's nose.

Fred started back, thoroughly startled at the vigor of the onslaught made upon him.

A third missile passed a foot above his head and went to pieces with a bang against the fence.

It was certainly too serious to be pleasant for the victim of the fusillade.

Fred picked up his hat, and, crouching in the shadow of the hedge, ran forward.

Then the bombardment ceased, for the object of the attack had disappeared.

King didn't go very far, but hid himself, awaiting further developments.

Presently he heard a rustling along the further hedge, and then a dark patch came into indistinct view beside the opposite fence, and this was almost immediately joined by another.

Then he heard voices in conversation.



Presently two forms vaulted over the fence and came out into the middle of the road.

"Where did he go?" said a voice, which Fred was willing to swear belonged to Micky Gibbs, a pal of Moses Wyse.

"Dunno," replied his companion, who Fred was sure must be Moses himself, as well as he could make out in the gloom.

"The rascals!" muttered the concealed boy. "It's like the cowards they are to get at me in such an underhanded way. They must have learned I went to Wilkesbarre, and they have been waitin' here to ambush me on the way back. I'd like to pickle 'em for it."

"He disappeared all of a sudden," went on Micky Gibbs, "jest as if he dropped inter the ground. Mebbe he's hidin' along ther hedge."

"Let's beat the bushes and see," suggested Moses. "If we catch him we'll lay it on to him good and thick. I don't care if we half kill him."

The two young rascals had come prepared for business, for Micky had a stout cudgel and Moses a wicked-looking whip.

Fred King heard every word they said, and their cowardly project made him mad.

"The miserable skunks!" he murmured. "They were goin' to knock me silly with chunks of coal first, and then finish me with a club and whip. I'll just give 'em a bit of surprise on my own hook and see how they like that."

Moses and Micky were gradually approaching the spot where he was hidden, beating the hedge and bushes as they came.

Micky was several paces in advance of his companion, and, of course, reached Fred first.

With a wild, Comanche-like yell, King rose up suddenly right under Micky's nose.

Young Gibbs was so startled that he let out a smiliar kind of yell and started to run.

Fred reached for him, snatched the stick out of his hand and gave him a good crack over the head, stretching the Irish boy half stunned on the road.

Moses was at first startled, too; but recovered himself in time to realize what had occurred, and he whistled the whip-lash about Fred's ears, raising a livid wale upon one of his cheeks.

King was thoroughly indignant before, but he was mad clear through now.

A second stroke fell upon his back and shoulders with vicious force, and Moses had drawn back his arm to inflict a third stroke, when Fred closed on him with a rush.

"You cur!" he cried, furiously. "I'll have no mercy on you now!"

Whack!

Moses got it square in the eye, and then the whip was snatched from his grasp.

"Take that, and that, and that!"

Fred had Moses by the collar of his jacket and was raining blow after blow upon his body and legs.

"Help! Help!" cried Moses, as each stroke cut his flesh

like the stings of a hundred scorpions. "Micky, help me! Knock him down! He's killing me!"

But there was no help for Moses, for Micky Gibbs was out of it.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" screamed Moses, struggling to avoid the terrible punishment he was receiving.

"You miserable coward! You sneak in the dark!" cried Fred, continuing to lay the whip on his enemy without the least intermission.

"Don't! Don't! Please don't! You're killin' me!" screamed Moses, in agony of pain.

"Would you have had any mercy on me, you whelp? I believe you two meant to lay me out for keeps to-night. Supposin' either of those hunks of coal had hit me on the head, as you intended they should, where would I have been? You might have killed me to-night down by the river with that piece of slate if your aim had been truer. And this is what I get for savin' a miserable hound like you from gettin' chewed up by Anderson's bulldog!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Oh! oh! oh!" howled Moses, dropping on to his knees. "I'll never touch you ag'in. I swear it. Please stop! Oh! oh! oh!"

The cowardly wretch, who had provided the instrument of his own punishment, shrieked, and yelled, and whined for mercy.

But for once the usually generous-hearted boy was implacable.

All the anger and indignation of his nature was aroused by this treacherous attack in the dark, and from which he had escaped only by a miracle.

He believed his two enemies would have fairly flayed him alive once they got him into their power, and this feeling left no pity in his heart for either of them.

Though Moses cringed and shrieked at his feet, he continued to whip him with an unsparing hand.

The young villain had never received such a punishment in his life, even from his father, who had very little mercy on him when chastising him.

Suddenly Moses ceased his heart-rending cries, and his head fell over on his shoulder.

He hung limp and lifeless in Fred's grasp.

He had fainted under the severity of the drubbing inflicted on him.

This fact brought King to his senses, and to the sober realization that he had gone too far.

He let go of Moses and young Wyse fell in a heap on the road.

Fred bent over him with sudden anxiety.

The young ruffian's white face seemed to reproach him for his fit of ungovernable anger.

"Great Scott! I hope I haven't killed him!"

The boy's voice died away in a horrified whisper.

He tore open Moses's shirt front and put his ear to his heart.



"He's breathin' all right," he muttered, with a sigh of relief. "I guess he's only fainted. I must have licked him more'n I intended. But he deserved every blow he got. Why can't he leave me alone?"

Then he noticed Micky rising to his feet a yard or two away.

He, too, looked like a mighty sick boy.

He had a lump the size of half a hen's egg on the side of the head where Fred had hit him with his own cudgel.

"Come here, Gibbs," Fred called, peremptorily.

The boy stared at him, but seemed rather disposed to take to his heels.

"Come here, I'm not goin' to hit you again. You want to look after Moses, and see that he gets home."

Micky came up slowly and looked down at his associate.

"Is he dead?" he asked, in a scared voice.

"No—only fainted."

"You must have given him an awful lickin'."

"Not more'n was comin' to him," answered Fred, starting to walk off.

At that moment a bright light suddenly lit up the near-by landscape.

"Great hornspoon!" cried Fred, as the glare of flames sifted through the trees. "That must be a house afire!"

He started for the opening on the wood on a dead run.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN WHICH FRED KING IS CHARGED WITH A SERIOUS CRIME.

The glare of the fire grew brighter as Fred approached the entrance to the wood.

Some house in the village was evidently in flames.

A moment later he dashed out clear of the trees, and his first glance at a familiar locality assured him that it was John Marsh's cottage that was burning.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the boy, "this is rough on Marsh!"

Anxious to be on the scene of trouble as soon as he could, Fred cut across by a by-lane, and before he knew what was in his way, had stumbled over the crouching figure of a man.

"Blast yer! Can't you see where yer goin'?"

"Jake Wyse!" exclaimed Fred, in surprise.

"Yer know me, do yer?" snarled the cracker boss, rising to his feet and laying hold of King. "Where yer runnin' to, you little imp?"

"John Marsh's house is afire, and I'm goin' to see if I can't help put it out."

Jake Wyse turned his head in the direction of the flames, and then Fred noticed another figure snuggling down in the gloom.

It was Gummitt, the Englishman.

"What yer doin' out here this hour in the mornin'?"

asked Wyse, with a wicked look in his eyes. "Don't you know you ought to be in bed?"

"I've been to Wilkesbarre, and only just got back," said Fred, struggling to release himself.

"Hold hard, I think yer lyin'. I believe you've sot fire to Marsh's house yerself. It's my opinion yer ain't none too good for that kind of work. What do yer think, Gummitt?"

"Hi shouldn't be surprised hif 'e did," coincided the landlord of the "Miners' Retreat," who detected the drift of Wyse's scheme.

"What do you mean?" gasped Fred, amazed at such an accusation.

"I mean just what I say. Ain't we ketched you runnin' away from the fire?"

"Runnin' away from it! Runnin' toward it you mean!"

"Come, now, that won't wash, will it, Gummitt?"

"Hi should think not," replied Gummitt, coming forward.

"You seen which way he was runnin', didn't you?"

"Hi did."

"So yer see, young feller, yer ketched in the act. Come along!"

"Let me go, will you?" cried Fred, in desperate earnestness.

"We couldn't think hoff hit," said Gummitt, laying his hand on the boy's other arm. "We're going to take you to the lock-hup."

"I believe you set fire to the house yourselves!" ejaculated Fred, angrily.

"The hidea!" cried Gummitt, with a look of virtuous indignation. "Did you 'ear that, Wyse?"

"You little imp!" roared Jake, giving his prisoner a rough shake which loosened Gummitt's grip.

At the same moment Fred gave a sudden tug and tore himself away from Wyse.

"Grab him, Gummitt!"

The Englishman tried to, but Fred, like an eel, wriggled out of reach and was off toward the burning cottage like a shot.

"'E's got away," said Gummitt, in a tone of disappointment.

"Well, let him go. We'll throw suspicion on him any way by sayin' we seen him runnin' from the fire."

"Hall right. And we can say that 'e changed 'is plan when 'e seen 'e was discovered and ran back again to pretend 'e just come to 'elp."

"That's right. We'll have to go to the fire ourselves, now, or it wouldn't look well."

So the two rascals started on a jog trot for John Marsh's cottage.

Quite a number of the miners had reached the scene of the fire by the time Fred arrived.

They were only half dressed, and many of them had brought buckets, and a chain was hastily formed to pass the buckets full of water from the well to the flames.

Of course, John Marsh and his wife had been aroused, and both were outside.



"Where's Annie?" asked Mrs. Marsh, anxiously, looking around and failing to see her daughter.

As if in answer to her question the window of a room in the rear attic was thrown open and the girl's head appeared at the opening.

Mrs. Marsh uttered a scream.

And well she might, for it was in this wing of the cottage the fire had started, and from the looks of things Annie was cut off by the flames from escape by the narrow stairway inside, which led to the second floor and her parents' sleeping-room.

A big, strapping miner, who was directing the bucket brigade, called for a ladder.

But it happened unfortunately that there was no ladder about the premises.

"Father!" screamed Annie. "Save me!"

Mrs. Marsh had been detained from rushing into the cottage, but now her husband made the attempt to rescue his child in the same way.

This was clearly impossible as the case stood, and he found that fact out when he reached the entry on the second floor.

The place was filled with a dense smoke, through which he found it impossible to force his way, and he thrust his head out of the nearest window to get air.

Amid this scene of wild excitement, added to every moment by fresh arrivals from the various houses, only one person had the ready wit to see a way to save Annie Marsh.

That one was Fred King.

He noticed that the stout oak tree which grew a few yards from the cottage, threw one of its sheltering limbs high above the window where the terrified girl, surrounded by the gathering smoke, her form thrown into bold relief by the glare of the flames in the room behind her, stood, begging in piteous accents to be saved.

No one observed him shin up the gnarled trunk of the tree, work his way upward among the limbs, and make his way carefully out that particular branch, which swayed and bent under his weight until a shout of encouragement from him drew Annie's eyes upward, and her little cry of surprise as she saw him coming out toward her attracted the attention of the crowd below.

As soon as his object was understood it was immediately appreciated, and a shout went up from the spectators, as well as from the perspiring neighbors who were passing the buckets with great zeal.

The farther out Fred progressed the lower bent the limb of the oak, until the boy, anchoring his legs around the branch, extended his hands to the girl.

"Stand up on the sill, Annie, and hold on by the side of the window jamb. That's right. Now steady yourself so I can catch you under the arms."

He grabbed her and swung her out into mid-air.

"Don't get frightened," he said encouragingly. "Grasp hold of the tree under my neck. All right. Now do you think you can hold on for a moment by yourself while I shift myself backward?"

"Yes," replied Annie, bravely.

"There's no danger if you just hold on," he said.

Then he released her, and she swung by her own grip over thirty feet up in the air.

He worked himself backward a foot or so, and then grasped her under the arms once more.

"Now let go," he said.

She did so.

He swung her the same relative distance as he had retreated, and then told her to grab hold of the branch again.

This plan was repeated again and again until Fred had got Annie well into the body of the oak tree, when he was able to pull her up beside himself.

There they rested a while to recover from their exertions.

Telling Annie to hold tightly to her seat, Fred clambered nimbly down and called for a blanket to put around the girl, who was only attired in her night-dress.

The article was soon got from the cottage, for the fire, now under control, had not reached the main part of the building.

In a short time Fred assisted Annie to reach the ground, where her mother was waiting to receive her, deeply grateful for her daughter's escape.

As the women folks gathered around the rescued miss, as is usual in such a case, King rushed away to make himself useful in putting the finishing touches to the end of the fire.

"You're a nervy young fellow," said the big miner admiringly to the boy.

"I'll bet he is," echoed another.

"And not one of us thought of doing such a thing for the poor girl," said a third.

"She'd have been burnt to death but for you," remarked a fourth, "for her room and the room underneath are completely gutted by the flames."

Other miners had their say, too, for all admired bravery however shown, whether above or below the ground.

Fred was quite overpowered by the praise showered indiscriminately upon him, and protested he had only done his duty as he saw it.

"That's all right," said the big miner; "but you were the only one to do it at the critical moment. You ought to have a medal. What do you say, boys?"

"Aye! aye!" was the unanimous verdict of all within hearing.

The last spark was extinguished, and, although the loss was considerable, the cottage was practically saved.

The crowd was gazing on the ruined wing of the pretty house and speculating as to the amount of the loss, which all supposed to be covered by the insurance, when Jake Wyse and Gummitt, who had left the scene a short time before, reappeared with Mr. Jinks, the constable.

"There he is," said Wyse pointing.

Jinks immediately walked up to Fred King, and putting his hand on his shoulder said, to the great surprise of all present:



"Young man, I arrest you for setting fire to this cottage."

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN WHICH FRED BEARDS THE CRACKER-BOSS IN HIS DEN.

Fred King started back in stupefied surprise, while the crowd of miners and other spectators gaped in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" gasped the boy.

"I guess you know what I mean," said the constable significantly, tightening his grasp on the lad.

"I guess you've made a blunder, Jinks," interposed the big miner, stepping up.

"I think not," replied the officer.

"Why, such a charge against this boy is ridiculous," said the miner stoutly.

"What's the trouble?" asked John Marsh, coming forward.

"Jinks here has arrested King, who saved your daughter's life in such a heroic manner, on the charge of firing your cottage. I say it's absurd."

"It is, indeed," coincided Marsh. "On what ground do you accuse the boy?"

"On the evidence of Jake Wyse and Mr. Gummitt. They are here, and you can question them. If there is any mistake, of course I won't take the boy."

"Well," said Marsh, frowning upon the cracker-boss and the tavern-keeper, who now came forward, "what have you to say about it?"

"We were comin' along the by-lane yonder, afore the fire, when, jest as it blazed up we ketched this young feller runnin' away from it as hard as he could put, and we nabbed him."

"That's a lie!" cried Fred hotly. "I wasn't running from the fire, but toward it, and you know it, 'cause I fell over you where you were hidden behind a bush."

"Don't yer tell me I lie, or I'll smash yer!" retorted Wyse in a threatening way.

"Stop!" exclaimed John Marsh, catching his uplifted arm. "What else is there to your story?"

"When he found he was ketched he fought Gummitt and me, and got away. That's the whole thing, and I kin prove it by Gummitt," and he looked at the tavern-keeper for confirmation.

"Hi ham villin' to swear to hit," asserted Gummitt, "'cause Hi was there."

"You met these men, then, Fred?" asked Marsh, kindly. "Remember, I haven't the slightest suspicion that you had anything to do with the fire."

"I should say not," coincided the big miner decidedly. "What do you say, boys?" appealing to the crowd surrounding them.

"Aye! aye! That's right," came from a dozen mouths.

"Yes, sir, I met these men, and they were hidin' in the bushes as I came along."

"What!" roared Wyse.

"The hidea!" said Gummitt, throwing up his hands.

"That's what you were, or I shouldn't have tumbled over you."

"You young villain!" began Wyse, but Marsh checked him. "You've had your say; now let the boy tell his story."

"That's only fair," said the big miner. "Spit it out, Fred."

"I went to Wilkesbarre to-night to see a friend of mine. On the way back I was waylaid by Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs, who tried to do me up in the wood, in revenge, I s'pose, for the lickin' I gave Moses this, that is, last evenin'."

"And I'm goin' to lick you for doin' it," cried Wyse in a threatening manner.

"You'd better not," interposed the big miner significantly.

"What have you got to say about it?" demanded Jake, angrily.

"Well, you jest lay your hand on him and see. Your boy ought to be big and strong enough to take his own part. You jest keep out of it."

"Moses and Micky tried to down me with big chunks of coal," went on Fred. "Besides, Gibbs had a club and Moses a horsewhip. I waited till they came out into the road to look for me and then I went for 'em both and laid 'em out myself. Then I saw the fire through the trees and started for it, tumblin' over Jake Wyse, as I said before. They grabbed me, and said they believed I had set fire to the cottage, and were goin' to turn me over to the constable, when I gave 'em the slip and came on here. That's the whole story, sir."

"And I believe you, my boy," said Marsh.

"You'd believe anythin' from that kid," said Wyse with a sneer, "'cause yere stuck on him. Well, it ain't none of my bizness. It's your loss, and if yer willin' to stand for it, of course yer kin, I s'pose. Mebbe yer thinkin' of makin' a good thing out'r the insurance," maliciously.

"P'haps you'll explain why you were hiding in the bushes so near this place when the fire started?" asked Marsh, significantly, for a strong suspicion against these two men was forming in his mind.

He understood how they regarded him.

"Who says we was hidin'?" demanded Wyse, with apparent indignation.

"You heard Fred King say so, didn't you?"

"He was lying to save himself."

"That's wot 'e was," backed up Gummitt.

"Well, I want both of you to understand I'm going to have this fire thoroughly investigated," said John Marsh sternly. "I'm not sure but it will be a loss to me, as I haven't yet received my signed receipt for the coming year's premium, which I mailed to the company three days ago."

"What about the boy?" asked Constable Jinks.

"The lad is not to be arrested," said John Marsh, decidedly.

"Then I guess I'll go home again," said the village officer, and he walked off.



"I'm much obliged to you, neighbors all," said the engineer of the Black Diamond colliery, "for turning out and saving the larger part of my property."

"You're welcome, John Marsh," said the big miner, who constituted himself spokesman for the crowd, "for we all know you'd do the same for us."

"That I would," replied Marsh heartily; "though I hope there will be no occasion, for fire is a dreadful thing, and not easily conquered once it gets a good hold."

Then the crowd broke up and went home in twos and threes, and the first to go were Jake Wyse and Gummitt, the tavern-keeper.

Next morning Jake Wyse appeared in the screen-room in a villainous humor.

The slate-pickers took warning from his appearance and avoided anything which might give their boss offense.

But it didn't avail them much.

He watched his slaves with the eye of a hawk, seemingly looking for an excuse to pitch into them.

As a matter of course he soon found the chance, and little Eddie Foster happened to be the first victim.

He rushed upon the little fellow and dealt him a severe blow with his blacksnake whip across the shoulders before he was aware of his approach.

Eddie cried aloud in pain, and all of the boys looked up with looks of unspoken sympathy for their companion.

This aroused Jake's anger to a fearful pitch and, with many oaths, he proceeded to ply the whip with impartial severity upon the others, thrashing every boy in the entire place in the most savage manner.

"You little imps!" he foamed at the mouth, "I'll make examples of every one of you before I've done."

While performing this task he seemed like a beast of prey more than a man.

He rushed around the screen-room in a rage, and seemed to revel in his brutal task.

The cries and frantic appeals for mercy only served to whet his appetite.

The little slaves now began to think he had actually gone mad, and regarded him with eyes full of horror.

He had always been a cruel tyrant, but never had he gone to such an extreme as on the present occasion.

At last he hit one of the biggest boys, a particular friend of Fred King's, over the head with his rawhide.

This lad, whose name was Billy Davis, smarting under the terrible blow, which for the moment drove him half wild with pain, seized a huge chunk of coal, and with it dealt the cracker-boss a stunning blow on the head, inflicting a deep gash, from which the blood spurted freely and ran down his face.

The blow maddened Jake Wyse.

He rushed forward and seized Davis by the throat with one hand, dragged him out on the floor, and began to rain blow upon blow upon his little body, till the rest of the lads, seeing he would certainly kill their comrade, attacked him from all sides.

Still holding on to his fainting victim, he plied the raw-

hide around him, striking the boys anywhere he could reach them, and with such good effect that they were obliged to draw off.

Then Wyse returned to the object in hand, and recommenced beating Davis.

Eddie Foster, in great terror, ran down and out of the building and almost into the arms of Fred King, who was crossing the yard at the time.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Eddie, in a paroxysm of excitement. "Save him! Save him!"

"What's the matter, Eddie?" asked Fred, holding the boy up.

"The boss is beatin' Billy Davis to death. Save him!"

Fred didn't wait to hear any more.

He knew what an ungovernable temper Wyse had when aroused.

Word had already reached the engine-room that Jake was in a fiendish humor that morning.

Then, too, Fred could hear the most heart-rending shrieks from the direction of the screen-room.

He had been through the mill himself and sympathized with the little slate-pickers.

So, on the spur of the moment, he rushed up into the breaker, arriving there just as Jake, having whipped Billy almost into a state of insensibility, was about to bring the heavy handle down on the poor lad's head with the intention of finishing his cruel work.

With a cry of anger, Fred dashed forward and tore the rawhide from the cracker-boss's hand.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN WHICH FRED TAKES HIS FIRST STEP ON THE LADDER OF SUCCESS.

"What are you tryin' to do?" cried Fred, indignantly. "Kill the boy?"

Jake stood a moment glaring at the brave lad, then he flew at him, saying:

"I'll kill you!"

Fred threw the whip down into the "Lion's Mouth"—a yawning space in the room, to fall into which meant certain death—and stepped back with compressed lips.

There is little doubt but matters would have gone hard with King if Jake Wyse could have got his hands on the boy, and Fred realized that fact.

As Jake came at him like a raging lion, the boy quickly side-stepped, and thus avoided his clutch.

He didn't want to strike the man if he could possibly avoid it.

Wyse recovered himself and followed the boy up, trying to keep between him and the door.

At length he crowded him toward the chutes, and from the baleful look in his eyes it looked as if he meant to force the boy into one of the pockets.



In trying to avoid both this peril and the boss himself Fred tripped and fell over the outside chute.

This happened just as Jake made another rush, seeing the boy apparently in his power.

The result was Wyse himself fell over Fred's body and pitched forward into one of the pockets himself.

Fortunately for him it was full at the moment, and the coal stationary.

While he was scrambling to extricate himself, Fred took Billy Davis in his arms and hurriedly made his way out of the breaker.

He carried the boy into the engine-room, and while trying to revive him told John Marsh what had occurred, and how he had become involved in the trouble with Jake.

"You had better see the superintendent at once," advised the engineer, "before Wyse gets in the first word, or you may find yourself in trouble. It is a serious matter for a lad like you to interfere with the cracker-boss."

"I believe he would have killed Davis but for me."

"Well, explain it all to the super, and I guess you won't hear anything more from it."

Fred took his advice and reported the incident at the office.

The superintendent came over and looked at Billy, who was in a pretty bad way.

He questioned him as to the cause of the trouble, and also had a talk with Eddie Foster.

Then he sent for Jake Wyse and asked for his explanation.

He saw the man was somewhat under the influence of drink, and after listening to his disjointed talk, gave him a call down, and threatened to discharge him if such a thing occurred again.

A few minutes after the colliery closed for the day, Eddie Foster ran into the engine-room and handed an opened letter to Mr. Marsh.

"I found that on the floor of the screen-room," he said. "It was torn open, so I pulled the letter out and read it. As your name is signed to it, I guess it belongs to you."

It was John Marsh's brief note to the insurance company in Philadelphia, enclosing the money-order and unsigned receipt for the coming year's insurance on his cottage.

The engineer regarded it in dumb surprise for a moment or two.

"You say you found this in the screen-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; I'm much obliged to you, Eddie, for bringing it to me.

The boy ran off home, while the engineer pondered over the circumstance, which meant the loss to him of the results of the previous night's fire, while it practically confirmed the strong suspicion he already had that Jake Wyse, assisted by the tavern-keeper, Gummitt, was at the bottom of a plot to ruin him.

Next day he called upon the superintendent of the colliery and had a talk with him.

Fred King was called into the conference, and asked to give his story of his meeting with Wyse and Gummitt in the by-lane.

While it was decided that the crime could not be brought home to the rascals, it seemed plain to the two men that Jake and the tavern-keeper were guilty.

As a result Wyse was discharged from the company's employ at the end of the current week, while Gummitt was visited by a committee, who quietly informed him that he would have to sell out and leave the village.

The night Fred visited his friend in Wilkesbarre he learned that a small farm a few miles from the Black Diamond colliery was for sale cheap.

The farmer had died recently, and his widow wanted to leave the State.

Fred, by great economy, had saved a couple of hundred dollars, which he had on deposit in the Miners' Bank in Wilkesbarre.

It was his great ambition to own a piece of good ground somewhere in the vicinity, so he took the first chance to call on the woman and see if he could do business with her.

She wanted \$800, claiming that the property was worth \$1,000 at least.

Finally she said she would take \$600 cash.

Fred had had the idea she might be willing to accept \$200 on account, and the balance in regular installments.

But she said she couldn't do that, as she wanted to get away.

So the boy gave the thing up as impossible for him to buy.

He mentioned the matter the next day to Mr. Marsh, and they had quite a talk about it.

The engineer sympathized with Fred's object.

He promised to go and see the property, and if it really was a bargain he thought likely the savings bank might be induced to advance the necessary \$400.

John Marsh was as good as his word.

He visited the farm, and being a good judge of the value of such land in that neighborhood, he saw that it was well worth buying.

"It will be a great inducement for Fred to persevere in his money-saving habit," he argued to himself, for he had the boy's best interests at heart, the more since he felt that his daughter Annie probably owed her life to his wit and bravery. "This place is worth every cent of \$1,000, if not more, and I doubt not after the bank has made its appraisal Fred will be able to borrow the sum he requires to purchase this property. In my opinion a young man cannot do better than invest his surplus earnings in real estate."

Mr. Marsh thought he owed it to Fred King to help him acquire the little farm.

So he put the ball in motion, and as soon as the bank reported favorably on the loan he had himself appointed Fred's legal guardian, and purchased the farm for the boy.

This was accomplished about thirty days after the fire



at the cottage, and Fred became the proud possessor of the Clover Farm on the Wilkesbarre road.

He had no difficulty in getting a tenant to work the place on shares, and this naturally would be a great help toward clearing himself eventually of the debt he had assumed.

Somehow it got out that Fred King, the engineer's assistant, had become a landowner, and many of the miners who knew the boy laughed at his attempt to make a start in life by means of a small farm which he could not work or live on himself.

"S'posin' I am at the foot of the ladder," said Fred to a group of these men one night after they had been badgering him upon the subject of his investment, "I hope to rise to the top some day. Others have done so, why not me?"

"Then you expect to be a rich man, eh?" laughed the big miner.

"I don't intend to be a poor one if I can help it," Fred retorted.

"Bravo, youngster," said one of the men with a grin. "But you won't never do it these days unless you have luck. Luck is everything. Wasn't it luck put these coal barons, as the newspapers call 'em, in possession of these mines? How could they pile up the fortunes they're getting if they didn't have luck? Tell me that. I haven't had any luck myself. I've managed at times to get up a step or two, but have always fallen down ere long, and now I've giving up striving, for luck is against me."

"It's not so much luck as scheming," cried another with a flourish of his pipe. "The selfish schemer gets up while more honest folks remain at the foot."

"It's my opinion," argued a third, with a wise shake of his head, gray from years of underground labor, "that patronage does it all. You must get somebody to take you by the hand and help you up, or you'll have no chance. Ain't that how the manager of this mine got to the top of the ladder? I can remember when he warn't no better than me—now look at him?"

Fred listened to the men, every one of them more than twice his age, and of ripened experience in their calling, but their words made no impression on his mind.

"Luck is all right in its way," he thought. "It's a good thing to be lucky. But a fellow would be a fool to wait for luck to come. He would be likely to starve before anything turned up. I believe a boy like me can make his own luck, by taking advantage of favorable circumstances, like the Clover Farm sale, for instance. I haven't any influential friend to take me by the hand and land me in the butter tub, so I have the more need to hustle for myself. If hard luck should come to me I mean to buck against it, and not sit down and chew the rag as some do, but persevere on to fortune. My purchase of the Clover Farm I look upon as my first real start in life. From this on I mean to branch out with every chance until some day I may be able to hold my head as high as the manager of the Black Diamond."

These were excellent resolutions for a boy of sixteen to make, and as our story proceeds we shall see how Fred King carried them out.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE BRAND OF CAIN RESTS FOR A MOMENT ON THE BROW OF MOSES WYSE.

Jake Wyse and Gummitt disappeared from the mining village on the same day, and as they were kindred spirits it was generally believed they had gone away together.

The Wyse family did not move away, however, and Moses continued to hold his job as a general helper in the company store.

Since the terrible whipping Fred had given him on the night of the fire he had hauled in his horns a bit, but he hated King a hundredfold more, and constantly longed for a chance to wreak revenge on him.

In this sentiment he was of course backed up by his crony, Micky Gibbs, who earned a living as a mule-driver in the mines—a situation fraught with much danger and excitement.

Ever since Fred had been promoted to the engine-room he had, with the advice and encouragement of John Marsh, applied himself diligently to a course of study with the laudable view of rising above the disadvantageous circumstances which hitherto had handicapped him.

He made great progress, as he was ambitious to rise in life, and he felt that whatever success he achieved depended entirely on his own exertions.

About the only recreation he allowed himself, aside from an occasional walk to Wilkesbarre of a Sunday afternoon, after he had attended Sunday school in the little village church, as was his regular practice, was to go two evenings a week to a singing school with Annie Marsh.

It was not because the boy had a particularly musical voice, or that he took any great interest in training it, that induced him to go to the school.

Rather was it because he enjoyed Annie's society to and from the schoolhouse on the outskirts of the village where the exercises were held.

Sometimes he couldn't spare the time to accompany her to the school, but he never failed to be on hand to see her home.

Since the fire Annie had come to look on Fred with a much warmer feeling than before.

This was only natural since but for his exertions that night she believed she would have been burned to death.

She always felt disappointed whenever Fred failed to turn up in time to take her to the singing school.

But she was a sensible girl, and felt that her boy-chum had good reasons for not coming to time.

So she contented herself with the reflection that he surely would be on hand when the exercises were over and the class broke up.

On one of these occasions, however, when the boys and girls had donned their caps and hoods and rushed out hilariously into the unlighted road leading into the village, Fred King had not appeared, nor was he to be seen outside.



Annie Marsh stood on the steps in a state of some perplexity.

"What's the matter?" asked one of her girl companions, "hasn't your beau turned up?"

"I haven't any beau, thank you," replied Annie spiritedly.

"Oh, my, what a fib!" laughed the girl. "Isn't Fred King your beau?"

"Certainly not," answered Annie, tossing her head.

"You never go 'round with any other boy."

"What of it? It doesn't follow he's my beau because he comes to singing school with me."

Whereupon there was a general laugh at Annie's expense.

"I guess Fred has given you the shake to-night," said one of the boys, with a grin.

"You'd better come along with us," advised another girl.

"You can't think of waiting out in this lonely spot. He mightn't come at all."

"Yes, come along; we may meet him on the road."

That decided Annie, and she joined the party, expecting to see Fred loom up at any moment.

But Fred didn't appear, and when the party had thinned down to one couple besides Annie, they volunteered to see her to her parents' cottage.

The reason why Annie's escort failed to be on hand when the singing school broke up was because he had been detained at the house of the superintendent of the Black Diamond mine, where he had gone that evening in response to a request on the part of that official.

The superintendent had taken notice of Fred, had investigated his record in the company's employ, and an opportunity having occurred which he felt would lead to the boy's advancement in a direction he thought preferable to the engine-room, he had asked him to call at his house.

Fred called and had quite a talk with the superintendent.

He learned that the chief engineer of the company wanted a bright boy to accompany him and assist in making surveys of coal lands.

"I was talking to Mr. Marsh about you this afternoon," said the superintendent, whose name was Maxwell, "and he speaks very highly of you. His intention was to make an engineer of you eventually. From what I have learned about you, however, I should advise you to accept this opportunity to enter the chief engineer's office, as it will open wider possibilities for the talents and energy I believe you possess. What do you say?"

"As you think the change will be an advantage to me, sir, I will accept it with thanks. While I had made up my mind to become an engineer, I did not expect always to be one, if I found I was fitted for something better."

"I am glad to see you are ambitious. That is the keynote to success in life."

"I have no doubt it is, sir."

"We will consider the matter settled, then."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I will inform the chief engineer that he can call on you as soon as he is ready."

"How soon do you think I will leave the engine-room?"

"I think within a very few days, as Mr. Wesley is making his preparations now for another survey."

At this point the clock struck nine, and Fred recollected that the singing school closed at that hour.

"Will that be all?" he asked, rising and picking up his cap.

"Yes, I think so. If you will wait a moment I will go along with you a part of the way, as I have some business to transact at the office."

As the colliery office was on the road to the school, the boy waited, and a few minutes later he and the superintendent started out together.

It happened that the singing class broke up earlier than usual that night, and it also happened that when Fred and Mr. Maxwell reached the road along which they had to walk Annie Marsh and her companions had only just passed that spot, and consequently the boy missed her by perhaps a minute.

Unconscious of this circumstance, Fred, after parting from the superintendent at a cross-road leading to the colliery, kept straight on to his destination.

Of course he found the village schoolhouse, where the singing class held forth, closed and dark.

"Too bad," he muttered, much disappointed, especially as he had intended to tell Annie all about the new job which had come to him.

The night was dark, the sky being overcast with black clouds which threatened a fall of rain.

The wind, too, had risen during the last half hour, causing the trees along the roadside to nod toward him, as if they thought he had no right to be out there at that time of night.

"Of course somebody else had to see her home," he continued to himself, with a little twinge of jealousy as he fancied that somebody might be a boy. "I'll have to square myself somehow. I got here as soon as I could, anyway."

He turned around and began to retrace his steps.

He hadn't gone very far before he heard voices by the side of the road.

He looked keenly to the right and left ahead and presently saw the glow of a bright spark in the darkness, which vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared.

Almost immediately a match flared up, and he saw the faces of two boys as one of them lighted a cigarette.

And though the illumination had lasted but a moment or two, Fred recognized the youths.

They were Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs, sitting on a tree trunk beside the hedge.

Fred did not fear them in the least.

Nor did he imagine they would bother him on this occasion.

"They won't care to tackle me again in a hurry," he chuckled as he gradually neared the young rascals.

But that was where he made a slight mistake in his calculations.

Dark as the night was their sharp eyes identified the figure of the boy they hated worse than anything else in this world.



"It's Fred King," said Moses in a hoarse whisper to his companion.

"I see it is," returned Micky, with a malevolent glitter in his eye. "Now's the chance for us to get square with him for wot he done to us in the wood."

"I wish we could," said Moses through his teeth, but he had his doubts, like all cowards, when the pinch came.

"Why not?" responded Micky, looking scornfully at his crony. "Ain't yer game to do it, after the way he done yer up with yer own whip?"

"Yah!" snarled Moses, as the unpleasant recollection recurred to him. "If I had a gun I'd shoot him."

"Would yer?" sneered Micky, eagerly. "Wot's the matter with takin' mine?"

The young mule driver pulled out an old pistol from his hip pocket.

"Here yer are—now take aim at him and let him have it."

But Moses hung back.

"Afraid, are yer?" and his unpleasant laugh reached Fred's ear, for he was now almost abreast of them. "There, I've cocked it for yer. All yer have to do is to pull the trigger."

Still Moses hesitated.

He had it in his heart to do the trick, but his nerve failed him.

"Take hold of it, can't yer?" growled Micky, pushing the weapon into his companion's hand. "Are yer goin' to let him get away?" as Fred passed a couple of yards away.

Moses' hand shook as he made an attempt to raise the revolver in the desperation of the moment.

Evidently he wasn't equal to the crime.

"Uh! You coward!" snorted Micky, angrily, giving his arm a jerk upward.

A loud report followed, and when the smoke cleared Fred King was seen lying all of a heap in the middle of the road.

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN WHICH FRED IS IMPRISONED IN THE CELLAR OF THE OLD DUTCH MILL.

"Now yer done it," jeered Micky Gibbs, who was a thoroughly bad youth from his boots up. "Yer've killed him. I didn't think yer had the nerve."

"I didn't," protested Moses, his face white with terror, "you done it."

"Me!" retorted Micky, with a wicked chuckle. "Ho, ho! I like that. Ain't yer got the gun in yer hand wot done it?"

Moses dropped the revolver as if it were a live coal.

"You knocked up my hand and made me do it," gasped Moses, his teeth chattering from fright, while his eyes almost started from their sockets.

"Bah! Yer make me sick!" said Micky. "If he's dead yer killed him. I kin swear to it."

"You won't tell on me, will you?" whimpered Moses. "I'll be sent to jail and hanged."

"What'll I tell on yer fer? Don't be a fool. I'd only git into trouble meself. Come on, let's look at him."

"I'm afraid. Oh, I hope he ain't dead."

Micky Gibbs looked down on his cowardly associate with the utmost scorn.

"Yer a nice one, you are. A little while ago yer was jest achin' for a chance to do him, and now yer've done it yer shiverin' and shakin' like a jelly fish. Yer give me a pain."

"It's awful to think you've killed a person," wailed Moses in terror.

Not that he felt sorry for Fred King, but rather for himself, for he dreaded the consequences of such a deed.

Micky had a more calloused conscience; besides he didn't consider himself responsible for the crime.

He didn't hold the revolver nor pull the trigger.

Leaving Moses to commune with himself he walked over to the motionless figure that lay in the road and gazed down at it.

A thin stream of blood was welling from a slight wound over Fred's ear, and running down under his collar.

"I don't believe he's dead for a cent," muttered young Gibbs.

He bent down and, pulling open the stricken boy's shirt, felt over the region of the heart.

"Naw! It's beatin' all right. He ain't dead no more'n me."

He dragged the unconscious boy into the grass to one side and reported the facts to Moses.

"He's only stunned, that's all."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Moses eagerly.

"Sure thing. Go an' see for yourself."

It was some moments before Master Wyse could muster up the courage to do it.

"No, he ain't dead," he said with an air of relief. "It's lucky for me he ain't."

"Wot are we goin' to do with him? Leave him here?" asked Micky.

Moses pondered a moment.

"Do you think he's much hurt?" he asked.

"Naw. He'll come to in a little while."

"And be as good as ever?"

"Sure he will."

This assurance comforted Moses, but in like proportion his hate for Fred King reasserted itself.

The boy's death would have been a great satisfaction to him if somebody other than himself was responsible for it.

He hated to see his enemy, as he looked upon Fred, escape so easily after all.

"Now we've got him dead to rights, we can fix him in another way," he said.

"How?" inquired Micky.

"Let's carry him down to the Dutch mill."

"What, that old deserted shack?"

"Yep."



"Wot fur?"

"So's to keep him out'r the way. We kin tie him in the cellar."

"I guess we kin do it. Then we kin come back to-morrer with a whip an' give him a lickin'."

The idea of applying a rawhide to the defenseless person of Fred King just suited Moses Wyse's ideas of retaliation for the whipping Fred had administered to him the night of the fire.

So they picked up the unconscious boy between them and started off through various by-lanes with which they were thoroughly familiar until they came out into the open country south of the village.

Over this they progressed slowly, taking frequent rests, until the old Dutch mill, long since out of commission, loomed up before them.

The stream which once upon a time had furnished power to turn the rotting moss-grown wheel was now but a mere rivulet, though in the spring it expanded to a stream of some size.

The base of the structure, comprising the cellar, was constructed of stone, while the two stories above were of wood, bearing the stains and scars of many a storm.

Moses and Micky carried their burden into the ground floor, which consisted of one big room, beneath the floor of which ran the stout shaft, to the outside end of which was suspended the water wheel.

A trap door at one end led to the depths below.

"He's comin' to his senses," said Micky when they placed Fred upon the floor. "We must get him down below right away."

That the old mill was not unfamiliar as a stamping ground to the young rascals was apparent when Micky went to a hole in one of the walls and pulled out a lantern and a stout piece of rope, together with a box of matches.

He lighted the lantern, then went over and threw up the trap.

There was a hook underneath the floor within reach, to which he hung the lantern.

Then he and Moses grabbed up their victim again and carried him down into the cellar.

They propped him up on a box against a post in the center of the place, to which they tied him as they thought securely.

The desire to gloat over the boy they hated induced Micky to get a pan of water and dash the greater part of it in Fred's face.

This produced the desired effect.

King opened his eyes with a long drawn sigh and looked about in a confused way.

"Where the dickens am I?" he said loud enough for his two enemies to hear.

They chuckled in great glee as they noticed the look of perplexity on his face.

Then he became conscious of their presence for the first time, and recognized them even in the dim light furnished by the lantern.

"What game are you fellows up to now? Where have you brought me to? You must have knocked me out in some cowardly fashion to get the best of me in this fashion."

"We've got you where we want you now," said Moses with a triumphant grin.

"What do you mean to do? You've tied me so I can't get back at you, you cowards! Well, it's a long lane that hasn't a turning. If you dare to ill treat me I'll do you both up worse than I did a month ago."

"I don't think," sneered Micky. "It's our turn now, and Moses is goin' to make you dance to the same music yer treated him to. He's goin' to lick yer till yer tongue hangs out. The crack over the sconce yer give me I'll call square as yer got a wuss one yerself to-night."

Fred was beginning to realize that something was the matter with his head.

It throbbed and pained him a good deal.

"Then I s'pose you rascals crept up behind me to-night and struck me down?" he said angrily, for he entertained a proper contempt for all acts of treachery.

"No matter how we done it, you went down all right," jeered Moses.

"You two must be fools if you think you can do anything to me and not get it back again with interest."

"We'll take the chances of that," grinned Micky. "Yer ain't so much after all."

"I'm goin' to lick you with a rawhide till I draw blood from you, if I die for it," said Moses with vindictive earnestness. "I hate you wuss than anythin' in the world."

"If you dare carry out your threat I promise you I'll make you wish you were dead yourself."

The fearless look Fred gave him made him uneasy, and he began to entertain some misgivings as to the ultimate outcome of the affair.

He hadn't by any means forgotten the dressing down Fred had given him, and though the thought of it nerved him on to revenge, still he shivered to think that he was, perhaps, inviting a repetition of that punishment.

"Don't mind him," said Micky. "Come along. He won't feel so cocky after he's spent a night in this ranch."

Moses was ready to go, so the two boys returned to the floor above, taking the lantern with them and thus leaving Fred in the darkness of the old mill cellar.

## CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH JAKE WYSE AND HIS FRIEND GUMMITT PROPOSE TO ROB THE OFFICE OF THE BLACK DIAMOND COLLIERY.

"I wonder if those scamps really mean to keep me in this place all night," mused Fred. "If they do they'll wish they hadn't done so," he added, bringing his teeth together with a snap which boded no good for Micky and Moses, who, by this time, had left the old mill and were on their way to their homes, chuckling over the success of their night's work.



"Whichever one of them hit me to-night fetched me a good rap by the way by head feels. I don't see how they did it, but there isn't any doubt of the fact. I was unconscious long enough for them to carry me here, whatever place it is—a cellar, I judge."

From which it would appear that Fred had no idea he had been shot, but rather it was his belief he had been downed by a club.

It is bad enough to be tied up in a lonesome cellar without the additional torment of a wounded head, so the reader may have some slight idea of what Fred went through in the next hour.

During this time there were no indications of the return of the little miscreants, therefore King came to the conclusion that they really intended to leave him there all night.

"I guess I can stand it," he muttered. "All the same I shan't stay if I can manage to slip these bonds and make my way out. Then look out Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs!"

Moses and his crony in tying Fred to the post had passed the short piece of rope twice around his body over his arms, and then once around his wrists, jamming the latter against the wood.

The job was not an expert one.

Still it would have held any one who was easily discouraged when his first efforts to free himself met with little success.

Fred King, however, was not built that way.

He resolved to get clear if it took him the rest of the night.

And he brought the same aggressiveness and perseverance to bear on his bonds that he was accustomed to expend on his daily labor, and his studies, and, in fact, anything he undertook to accomplish.

This is one of the secrets of success in life.

When you have a task before you which looks difficult, don't get discouraged if, after you make a start, things don't seem to come your way.

Go at it with a vim and keep at it—you'll find it will only be a question of time and patience before you get there.

Whatever is worth while is worth the effort.

You probably remember the old saying: "If at first you don't succeed, try again."

True grit and perseverance brought all our successful men to the front, and what they did most of our boys are capable of doing.

Fred simply made up his mind that that rope wasn't going to hold him a prisoner and it didn't, though it took him full two hours to free himself of it.

It took that time to work his hands clear, and the rest was easy.

The first thing he did was to feel his head where the blood had dried on the wound.

It was a mighty sore spot, and the pain caused him to register a vow of reprisal against Moses and Micky.

"It takes a lot of thumping to put sense into some people, but I guess I'm equal to the emergency. The hiding I gave

Moses would satisfy most boys for a long time, but I guess he got so much of it from his father, who had that sort of thing down to a fine art, that it failed to have the proper effect. We'll see what another dose will do."

Fred got up, found a match in his pocket and struck a light on the situation.

"Gee! This is a cellar, all right, and a pretty musty one. These steps lead to a trap door. If it isn't fastened on the other side there's nothing to prevent me from getting out. Hello! What's that? There's somebody walking overhead. Sounds like more than one person."

Clearly a couple of men were crossing the floor above.

The noise didn't last, but the creaking sound which followed seemed to indicate that the individuals in question were ascending a rickety stairway.

Then there was silence as complete as before.

Fred waited five minutes before he tried the trap door and found that it was not secured.

"This is easy," he laughed softly, as he stepped out of the cellar and let the trap gently back into place.

He could dimly make out the open doorway, then he became aware that it was raining hard.

Peering through the entrance he could see nothing but intense darkness.

He couldn't get the slightest clue as to where he was.

That he was in the old Dutch mill, more than a mile on the outskirts of the village, was the last thing which would have occurred to him.

But when he cautiously lit a match and looked about the room he recognized his surroundings, for this wasn't the first time he had been in the old ruin.

"Gee! So they took all the trouble of bringing me out here, a mile and a half from the schoolhouse road. It looks as if they intended to keep me prisoner a while. No one would think of looking for me at this place. They're a foxy pair."

Just then he heard the sound of a heavy pair of boots on the floor above.

"I wonder who those men are who went upstairs a few minutes ago?" mused Fred. "I can't see what business anybody has in this building. If they came here merely to escape the rain they wouldn't bother climbing to the loft."

Fred's curiosity was excited, and as he didn't propose to start for home till the rain let up he resolved to creep up the stairs and see who the intruders were.

He took off his shoes and made his way to the loft as noiselessly as possible.

The second floor of the mill was divided by a rough partition into two compartments of about equal size.

One of these had a door which was closed, the other looked dark and uninviting.

The sound of voices proceeded from behind the door.

Fred saw a gleam of light flashing through what he judged to be a knot-hole in the partition; but to reach it he would have to walk some little distance into the dark room.

He found he had another match in his pocket, and he softly lit it on his trousers before venturing into the gloomy



space beyond, since he could not tell what obstruction he might run against in the blackness.

The momentary glare of the match showed that the compartment was entirely bare of anything but an accumulation of dust and cobwebs, so he entered and tiptoed his way to the knot-hole, an opening as large as the palm of his hand.

Two men were squatting on the dirty floor near the center of the room with an overturned box between them on which was spread a page of a daily paper and the remains of a cold repast, which they were devouring with great relish.

A piece of candle stuck into the neck of a whiskey bottle furnished illumination.

Fred recognized the two individuals with a start of surprise.

They were Jake Wyse and Gummitt, and both looked as if circumstances were not running in their favor.

"You're sure the money his hin the safe?" Gummitt was saying.

"Sure. To-morrer is pay-day. The cashier always brings the cash from Wilkesbarre the afternoon before."

"Then we'll make a big 'aul. Hi hain't cracked a crib since hi left the hold country, but hi know the ropes as well as hever."

He reached his hand behind him and brought into view a bag, which gave forth a rattling sound.

"'Ere are the beauties wot'll whistle hopen hany Hamerican safe as was hever made. They belong to a pal Hi run across in Wilkesbarre. 'E's laid hup with the rheumatiz or Hi'd 'ave awsked 'im to join hus."

"You've got a complete outfit for safe-breaking, have you?" responded Jake, with a greedy glance at the canvas bag.

"Hi 'ave."

"And so you're an expert at the bus'ness."

"Hi ham."

"How came you to leave England?" asked Wyse with some curiosity.

"Hit got too 'ot for me hover there, so Hi took me hold 'ooman hand me lawst swag hand crossed the hocean."

"Did you try your hand on this side?"

"Honly once, hand was sent hup for seven years. When Hi got out Hi came 'ere hand hopened the 'Miner's Retreat.' Hi meant to try the honest lay, but Hi've been driven hout, hand me hold 'ooman 'as shook me."

"Well, if you can break into the safe at the office of the Black Diamond colliery we'll be fixed for life, and I shall have revenge for my discharge."

"'Ow habout the watchman?" asked Gummitt, with professional caution.

"I'll answer for him, while you attend to your part."

"Hall right. Your hold 'ooman knows 'ow to make a meat pie hall right," said Gummitt, smacking his lips over the last crust.

"That's what she does. Have you any tobacco?"

"Hi 'ave," and Gummitt produced part of a bag of fine cut.

Both men lighted their pipes and then went into the details of the job they had on hand.

Fred listened attentively to their conversation, since it was his duty to be fully prepared to frustrate their criminal intentions.

They arranged to begin operations in the early hours of the morning.

It was now past midnight.

"I guess it's stopped rainin'," said Jake at last, "we may as well be on the move."

"Hi'm willin'," agreed Gummitt, getting on his legs.

It had been Fred's intention to get away first and make his way as fast as he could to the house of Constable Jinks, but he saw that this would be a dangerous move, so he resolved to wait till the rascals had left the mill.

Jake blew out the light, Gummitt took up his bag of tools, and the twain walked out of the next compartment and so on down stairs, the ancient steps shivering and groaning under their heavy tread.

Fred crept as far as the head of the stairs and listened so that he might be certain when they had gone.

However, they did not leave the lower floor immediately.

They filled and lit their pipes once more, and loitered about the door, smoking for a good twenty minutes before they ventured forth.

Fred waited all of ten minutes after they had stepped outside, to make sure they were not still around somewhere, and then he started down.

He had only taken two or three steps when, without the slightest warning, the old stairway suddenly collapsed beneath him.

He was precipitated head foremost to the floor below with a shock which stretched him out stunned and bleeding.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH JAKE - WYSE AND GUMMITT GET AWAY WITH THE "SWAG."

For two hours Fred King lay insensible on the floor of the old mill.

The rain clouds had passed away and the moon was shining like a big cheese in the sky.

The wind had fined down to a soft zephyr which kissed without disturbing the glistening raindrops hanging pendant from the trees and shrubbery.

Then it was that the boy began to move upon the hard planks, and presently he sat up with the indefinite feeling of one awakening from a dream.

For the second time within a few hours he asked himself where was he.

And it was several minutes before recollection asserted itself and the events of the night rushed upon his mind.

"By George!" he ejaculated, "I remember now, I started



to come downstairs after those rascals, and then something happened. What was it?"

He staggered to his feet and felt his head.

The concussion had re-opened the pistol-shot wound at the time, but that had dried again after another flow of blood.

"I'm up against it to-night for fair," he muttered.

Then he observed the ruins of the stairway which lay all about him, for now that the moon shone objects could be clearly distinguished in the room, and the cause of his mishap was plain.

"I certainly had a nasty fall. It's lucky I didn't break my neck. It's better to have been born lucky than rich."

He felt kind of shaky on his legs, but the recollection of the contemplated burglary at the office of the Black Diamond colliery acted as a spur to his benumbed energies.

"Good gracious! I wonder how long I was unconscious?"

This was a poser.

Walking outside he looked up at the moon as if he thought he could tell the hour by its position in the sky.

But he couldn't.

"Those fellows have a big start on me I'm afraid. Well, I'll hurry along to Constable Jinks'. I don't believe those rascals will be able to open that safe very quick. It'll be hard luck if we don't catch them in the act."

It took thirty minutes for Fred to reach Constable Jinks' cottage, and nearly ten more before he managed to arouse the inmates.

"What's the matter?" asked the voice of Mrs. Jinks, as she poked her night-capped head out of an upper window.

"I want to see Mr. Jinks."

"He's asleep. Do you know what hour it is, young man?" she said with some asperity.

"About twelve o'clock, isn't it?" asked Fred anxiously.

"Twelve o'clock!" exclaimed the good lady sarcastically. "Nearer three."

"What!" gasped the boy. "So late as that?"

"Late! Early in the morning, you mean."

"Good gracious! I'm afraid I'm too late, then."

"Too late! What do you mean?"

"I mean there's a plot under way to break into the office of the Black Diamond colliery and open the safe for the money that's known to be there. I wish you'd tell Mr. Jinks about it, and say I overheard the scheme, and he ought to get up and come with me to the superintendent's house."

With an exclamation Mrs. Jinks' head vanished and presently was replaced by the rubicund visage of the constable himself.

"What's this about a robbery at the Black Diamond office?" he asked sleepily.

"Please dress yourself as quickly as possible. I'll tell you all about it as we go along."

"But—but—" sputtered the constable, who didn't relish the idea of leaving his warm bed at that hour.

"There isn't a moment to be lost if we're going to catch the thieves," cried Fred impatiently.

"Well, well, I'll be down in a moment," the officer said testily, as he closed the window with a bang.

Fred thought Mr. Jinks took a long time to get into his clothes, and he was beginning to feel uneasy over the outcome of the affair, when Jinks appeared with his coat on his arm.

"Now let me hear all about it," he said after he recognized his early caller.

Fred told his story, which duly astonished the guardian of the mining village, as they walked rapidly toward the superintendent's cottage.

It didn't take one-third as long to arouse Mr. Maxwell, and bring him outside fully prepared for business, as it had the constable.

He was a man of action, and his active mind grasped the meaning of Fred's words in a twinkling.

"We must arouse the new cracker-boss on our way, and one or two others. These rascals won't be captured without a struggle, I dare say. I am hardly surprised to learn that Jake Wyse is mixed up in this. His record is none too good. It's pretty certain it was he and Gummitt set fire to Mr. Marsh's cottage. If we only could have brought it home to them we could have put both of them behind the bars, where they evidently belong. I hope we'll nail them now. It will be ten years at least for the scoundrels."

By this time they were pounding on the door of the cottage where lived the new foreman of the screen-room, and five minutes sufficed to get him outside.

Mr. Maxwell then aroused a couple of the yard men.

The superintendent and the constable were provided with their revolvers.

The others, including Fred, were expected to rely on nature's weapons—their fists.

As they hurriedly drew near the Black Diamond colliery buildings, they saw a light shining from one of the office windows.

"I guess we're in time," cried Fred, joyfully, for up to that moment his mind had been filled with doubts as to whether they would be in time to head off the ruffians.

The superintendent halted his little band and explained the tactics he intended to put in practice.

Then they advanced again with due caution.

Drawing close to the office window Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Jinks peered through the glass.

The stout safe was in full view with the gas jet burning dimly above it as was the usual custom.

But its ponderous door had been blown open by a charge of dynamite, and the carpeted floor in front was littered with papers and miscellaneous documents discarded by the thieves as of no value to them.

There was no sign of the rascals who had wrought the damage.

"We are too late!" exclaimed the superintendent in a voice of dismayed concern. "The villains have succeeded in getting away with their booty. There was over \$20,000 in that safe."

While the others started to enter the office Fred made a break for the rear of the building.



Why he did so he couldn't have explained even to his own satisfaction.

It was an impulse of the moment that he acted upon.

As he came around on the other side of the office he almost ran into a man's arms.

It was Gummitt, who uttered a curse and started to run.

Fred recognized him and was on his heels like a flash.

"Stop, you thief!" he cried shrilly.

Gummitt, seeing he was at a disadvantage, dashed his canvas bag of tools full in the boy's face.

Fred was staggered and went down on his hands and knees.

As he staggered to his feet he saw both Gummitt and Jake Wyse vanishing around the corner of an outbuilding.

Shouting loudly to alarm the rest of the party Fred started in full chase after the rascals.

## CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH FRED RECOVERS THE STOLEN MONEY AND IS FITTINGLY REWARDED BY THE COMPANY.

Jake Wyse and Gummitt scooted for all they were worth.

The former carried a small hand satchel in which was stowed the stolen money, and he hung on to it like grim death.

They skirted the different buildings until they struck a lane leading into the Wilkesbarre road.

Fred King gained rapidly on them.

The boy was determined they should not escape.

They reached the turn of the road first, however, and disappeared.

Then they stopped, crouching down and lay in wait for their pursuer, for they knew they couldn't elude him by trusting entirely to their legs.

Fred came on at full speed, never dreaming of the trap awaiting him.

At the critical moment Gummitt shot out his foot and Fred tripped and pitched forward like a stone from a catapult, landing several feet away in the middle of the road.

There he lay half stunned by the shock, while Gummitt and his companion started off toward Wilkesbarre at a rapid trot.

Fortunately Fred was not much hurt by the fall, though it was the third severe layout he had since nine o'clock of the night before.

He pulled himself together and started to track the rascals to the city, for which he knew they were bound.

He had gathered from their conversation in the loft of the old mill about what section of Wilkesbarre they would aim for, and laid his plans accordingly.

"I'm not going to let those fellows get the best of me if I can help myself," he muttered sturdily to himself. "Neither am I going to follow them through the wood, where the pair of them could lay for me among the trees and

polish me off in great shape. No, sir-ee, bob! I mean to reach the city first and put the police on to them."

By the road Wilkesbarre was six miles away.

But by taking advantage of various short cuts familiar to him, Fred could reduce that distance by one-third.

Upon that plan he acted.

Although his head ached as if it would split open, and his blood coursed through his veins at fever pitch, the boy brought all of his indomitable energy to the fore, fully determined to win out.

How many boys would have shown such grit under the circumstances!

Yet the lives of all our successful men show examples of it.

Day was breaking when Fred, covered with dust and perspiration, his wounded head swollen and inflamed, reached the outskirts of Wilkesbarre.

He had no idea where he might find a police station, but he hoped to run across an officer in the streets.

His enthusiastic project for capturing Wyse and Gummitt had pictured an officer waiting for him at the first corner.

But we are afraid his brilliant scheme would have sadly miscarried, and the thieves would have easily eluded him, but for the fact that Superintendent Maxwell had notified the Wilkesbarre police of the robbery and flight of the miscreants by telephone, and half a dozen of the force were patrolling the outskirts on the lookout for the rascals.

Fred ran against one of these men and was immediately taken in charge as a suspect.

He was hustled off to the nearest station.

He tried to explain matters to the policeman, but his appearance was against him.

At the station he was subjected to a searching examination, and his earnest demeanor and straightforward answers created a favorable impression.

He insisted that he believed he could lead the officers in the right direction, and that delay was likely to prove of advantage to the thieves.

The officer in charge appreciated this idea, and he instructed two of his best men to go with Fred, but they were cautioned to keep their eyes on him.

He piloted them toward the neighborhood through which he believed the rascals would pass.

It was near the point where the Wilkesbarre road merged itself into the city limits.

A region of factories and tenements.

One of the officers stepped into a convenient doorway on the street, while the other, with Fred, entered a by-lane and stood in the shadow of a big factory.

The rising sun was just beginning to gild the eastern sky with its preliminary glow when Fred clutched the policeman by the arm and whispered:

"Here they come."

The officer looked at the advancing figures and saw they tallied with the lad's description given at the police station.

Jake Wyse had the grip in his hand, while Gummitt,



with a false mustache adjusted, had his hands in his pockets.

They were taking things easy, as if satisfied they had eluded pursuit for the time being at least.

But their sharp eyes were on the alert just the same.

As they entered the lane Gummitt noticed the outline of the policeman in the shadow of the factory door, and he stopped suddenly, grasped Jake by the arm and said something to him.

Wyse gave a start, then they turned around and took the other street.

Bidding Fred follow him the officer started on a run after the rascally pair.

Fred, however, didn't obey, but decided to head the men off by cutting through an adjacent alley.

It was a lucky move, as the sequel will show.

As Jake and Gummitt passed rapidly up the street, the other officer, from his post in the doorway, identified them and walked out to head them off.

The two thieves, now on their guard, dashed past him at full speed as the steps of the second officer, the one who had been with Fred, sounded on the walk behind.

It was the most natural thing in the world for them to take the first turn they came to, which was the alley Fred was aiming for.

He reached it just as Gummitt flew by with his companion close behind.

The boy sprang forward and made a grasp for Jake.

"You will, will you?" snarled Wyse, recognizing Fred on the instant, and striking viciously at him.

The boy ducked nimbly and tackled the ruffian low down, football fashion.

The consequence was the fellow lost his balance and measured his length upon the ground, while the valise, containing the stolen property, went flying several feet away.

"Hang you! Let me go!" gritted Wyse, as he tried to rise.

"Not on your life," answered Fred, gripping him harder.

"I'll kill you for this!" roared Jake, making ineffectual efforts to kick himself free.

But the game was up for him, for the foremost officer rushed up and had a pair of handcuffs on his prisoner in a twinkling.

Then Fred let go his hold on Jake's legs and hastened to secure the precious valise.

By the time the second policeman came up Gummitt was out of sight.

"I've got the money," cried the boy triumphantly, and then the excitement and culmination of his plucky efforts proved too much for his young nerves at last, and he fell in a dead faint, the officer catching him in his arms.

While Fred was being revived in a neighboring saloon, Wyse was led off to the station, the officer carrying the valise, and it wasn't long before the telephone to the Black Diamond colliery was telling the story of the capture of one of the thieves and the recovery of the stolen money.

As soon as Fred was able to walk he was taken to Police Headquarters, where he was attended to by the surgeon of the department.

Then he was taken to a near-by restaurant and treated to a good breakfast.

"I feel like a new boy now," he remarked to the officer in charge of the desk when he came back to await the arrival of Superintendent Maxwell.

"He's a plucky young fellow," remarked the superintendent to the chief of police a little later.

"He looks like it. The capture of the man who carried the money was actually made by him, owing to his foresight in taking to the alley instead of following the officer he was with."

"As it's a matter of \$20,000 the company is certain to reward him handsomely," intimated Mr. Maxwell.

"He deserves whatever the directors of your company may think fit to present him. He told me the whole story of his night's adventures before you came, and I am bound to say his vitality and pluck are most remarkable."

On the way back to the village in Mr. Maxwell's buggy Fred rehearsed his strenuous experiences of the last twelve hours, and some days later repeated them before the board of directors of the Black Diamond colliery.

He was highly commended for his conduct, and the board unanimously voted him a reward of \$1,000, which was paid to him the same day in the form of a check.

The next morning his successor in the engine-room took his place and Fred reported at the office of the chief engineer, prepared to take up his new duties.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### IN WHICH MOSES WYSE HAS A SCHEME TO DO UP FRED KING.

Gummitt was not caught, so it was presumed he had escaped from the State, and probably had gone to Canada.

Jake Wyse was duly tried, and, largely on Fred's evidence and his past record, got the maximum penalty, and was sent to the State prison.

Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs kept very shady whenever Fred was within reach of them, and the lad concluded to let them alone as long as they didn't bother him.

Fred liked his new position under the chief very much indeed.

He had a better opportunity to study and improve his mind.

The rough diamond qualities had begun to wear off from the day he was emancipated from the screen-room of the breaker, and the polish had commenced to show itself little by little after he was introduced to the engine-room, from which time he saw much more of the John Marsh family and began to associate with a better grade of the village society.

Now the polish was coming on more rapidly, the superior



qualities of his mind and the energy of the character asserting themselves.

"He is a remarkable boy," said Chief-Engineer Wesley to Superintendent Maxwell one day a few months after Fred had come under his jurisdiction. "He is bright, attentive and smart, and dutiful almost to a fault. I like him very much."

"I believe you," replied Mr. Maxwell. "One would scarcely think, to look at him now, that a few years ago he was an apparently ignorant little slate picker. Why, six months ago he bought the twenty-acre Clover farm for \$600, paying \$200 down, his savings to that date, and giving a mortgage for the balance. The place is easily worth to-day \$1,200. Mr. Marsh is acting as his guardian."

"You surprise me," said the chief engineer. "Take my word for it, that boy is going to make his mark."

One day Fred was in Wilkesbarre and accidentally came across a sale of horses.

He was very fond of animals, and one of his ambitious hobbies was to become the owner of a good horse.

A very handsome looking mare was put up while he was looking on.

The auctioneer explained that she was afflicted with some disease of the eye, which was apparent to the onlookers, but he did not dwell much on the fact, as a matter of course, but devoted his oratory to calling attention to the animal's other good qualities.

Many would-be purchasers examined the mare with much interest, but the eye trouble deterred them from bidding.

Finally the auctioneer offered her for \$50, but nobody took him up.

Then he reduced the price to \$40 without success, and the mare was about to be taken back to her stall when Fred impulsively shouted:

"I'll give you \$35."

"She's yours, young man."

Fred had only a \$5 bill with him, and paid that on account, while he hastened to the mining village to get his bank book.

As soon as he could get back to Wilkesbarre he drew the necessary funds and took charge of the mare.

Then he consulted the stable veterinary surgeon.

"The animal has got an incurable cataract of the eye," replied that person very frankly.

"Will she become blind, do you think?"

"In time, yes."

Fred asked no more questions on the subject, but took his purchase back with him, and left her at Clover farm.

"I may have made a poor investment," he said to himself; "but I don't care, I like that horse."

Fred thought the matter over for a week, and finally got books treating about the human eye as well as the diseases of horses, and studied the subject carefully.

Finally he decided to treat the mare himself.

"It is possible the veterinary doctor was mistaken. At any rate I'm going to do something for the horse myself."

He tried several remedies without result, but at length

hit upon one which had been notably successful with the human eye.

As a matter of fact the mare was not afflicted with a real cataract, though she had many of the symptoms of the disease.

Fred's perseverance and gentle care triumphed, and the animal was completely cured in four months.

In due course of time a fine colt was added to Fred's possessions.

The animal was scarcely three months old when the boy was offered \$3,000 for him, but refused to sell.

Fred was now eighteen years old, and had advanced several steps upward in the chief engineer's office.

Mr. Wesley put a great deal of confidence in him, for his work was strictly accurate and well done, and, therefore, could be relied on.

Although he had had no actual collision with either Moses Wyse or Micky Gibbs for more than a year, those worthies had it in for him just the same.

On the principle that all things come to him who waits, they were laying on their oars, so to speak, hoping, if not actually watching, for a chance to get back at him.

Annie Marsh had developed into a very charming young miss of seventeen.

Many of the villagers were of the opinion that in time she would be the most beautiful woman in the Wyoming Valley.

Fred had always admired her in his way.

Now he was prouder than ever to be seen in her society.

Occasionally of a Sunday he took her out riding, and once in a while he would induce her to take a sail with him in a small catboat, the property of Mr. Wesley, on the delightful Susquehanna.

"I shall be off duty to-morrow afternoon," he said to her one Friday evening as they stood talking at the corner of the lane leading to her home. "I wish you'd take a sail with me."

It was dusk and they stood quite close together in the shadow of the hedge.

"Well," she replied, a little bit coquettishly, "are you really so very anxious for me to go?"

"Oh, come now, Annie, you know I am," he said, earnestly.

"I'll think about it," she said, flashing a saucy glance at him.

"Then you won't give me a decided answer?" he said in a disappointed tone.

"I must ask mother," she replied demurely.

"You know she won't object," persisted Fred.

"Well," answered the girl, coyly, after a pause, "if it's a very pleasant afternoon——"

"You'll go," interjected Fred eagerly.

"I didn't say so," she replied archly.

"But that's what you were going to say, wasn't it?"

"Who gave you permission to catechise me?" she asked laughingly.

"Oh, pshaw, Annie! You're in a teasing humor to-night. Come now, be reasonable. You're going, of course?"



"I presume you won't give me any rest till I say yes. You're the most persevering boy I ever met."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are. Well, yes. Now are you satisfied?"

"I ought to be. I'll call for you at three."

"I will look for you at that hour."

Then the young people continued their walk to the cottage, where Fred was invited to take supper.

They had scarcely turned their backs on the hedge before a sallow, freckled face, in which a physiognomist would hardly have found a redeeming feature, was thrust, through the leaves and twigs, and the small wicked-looking eyes followed the retreating forms of the boy and girl up the lane.

It was Moses Wyse, not much different than when we saw him last in the cellar of the old mill, but more than a year older.

A second face popped up over his shoulder which could never be mistaken for any one but Micky Gibbs.

Micky was still a mule driver in the mines, and his ambition was fully satisfied with the post, for he could beat the dumb beasts to his heart's content without fear of retaliation on their part.

He often boasted that he had put a half dozen of them out of commission, and we have no doubt but that he spoke the truth.

"He's goin' to take his gal on the river ter-morrer, did you hear that, Micky?"

"D'ye t'ink I'm deaf?" replied his crony, ejecting a squirt of tobacco juice into the lane.

"We've been wantin' to git square with him for a good while, ain't we?"

"Sure t'ing. Ef yer'd more backbone we'd 'r done it, too, long ago."

"I'm thinkin' we have a chance now," said Moses mysteriously.

"Let's hear about it, then," asked Micky with some curiosity.

"He's goin' to use Wesley's boat."

"Wot ef he is?"

"We could go down to the boathouse to-night, break into the place, and with an auger bore half a dozen holes in the bottom of the boat——"

"So she'd sink," grinned Micky.

"No," returned Moses with a snarl. "We'd plug 'em loosely from the bottom, tie stout cords to the ends of the plugs, and then tie the other ends of the cords to spikes we'd drive into out-of-sight places in the boathouse under water."

"Well," asked Micky, "wot then?"

"What then?" exclaimed Moses scornfully. "Why, when he pushed the boat out into the river, with him and the gal on board, the cords would pull out the plugs, wouldn't they?"

"Ef they wuz strong enough."

"We'll see they're strong enough," nodded his companion determinedly. "Then the water would come inter the cabin, and they'd never notice it till it began to run out inter the

cock-pit, which is a foot higher. By that time they'd be way out on the river, too far to sail back afore the boat 'd sink—see?"

Micky saw and grinned.

"Yer've got'r great head arter all, Moses. I never'd have b'lieved it."

"Are you with me in this?"

"Betcher life I am."

"Come over to my house and we'll make the plugs. We'll stop at the store and I'll hook a roll of cord—we've got a lot of good stout stuff there that'll jest answer the purpose."

Then the two heads disappeared behind the shrubbery again, and the lane was as silent as before.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE.

After they had got the tools and material together for their wicked project Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs spent the rest of the evening until close on to midnight in the kitchen of the Wyse domicile playing cards.

Moses was accustomed to come in and go out when he chose without question from his mother, who felt obliged to knuckle to him as he was the chief support of the family, two of the other young Wyses being employed in the screen-room of the breaker at very small wages.

When the clock indicated a quarter to twelve Moses threw down the cards and suggested to Micky that it was time to get busy.

"I'm ready," replied Master Gibbs, lighting another cigarette, an example immediately followed by Moses himself as he led the way outside.

He went to the woodshed and got the parcel.

Then the young rascals made their way to the river by a round-about way, whence they sneaked under the shadow of the banks till they reached Mr. Wesley's boathouse.

It wasn't a hard matter to force one of the side windows, and through this opening they entered the boathouse.

It took them more than an hour to accomplish their purpose, after which they got out as they had entered and closed the window tight.

Then they went to their homes to dream over their expected revenge.

Promptly at three next day Fred knocked at the door of the Marsh cottage and was admitted by Mrs. Marsh.

"Annie is all ready and waiting for you," she said with a smile.

"And I'm on time to the minute," he said, pointing at the clock.

"I believe she'd had a conniption fit if you'd been five minutes late."

"The idea, mother!" Aren't you awful!" exclaimed Annie, who entered the room at that moment, looking simply charming in her fetching summer hat and white lawn dress.



"You'll be back before dark, won't you?" asked Mrs. Marsh of Fred.

"Oh, yes, we expect to," answered the lad, who looked very handsome and manly in navy blue coat and trousers, cambric shirt, with blue dots, and a wide leather belt and straw hat.

"They're a fine looking couple," remarked many a miner's wife, observing them as they passed along the streets toward the Susquehanna. "I shouldn't be surprised if it will be a match."

Fred had the key to the boathouse.

"Let me help you on board?" said the boy, after they had entered.

Then he opened the tall outer door which came to a point like the upper half of a diamond, and gave the boat a stout push.

Something seemed to hold her back, and Fred looked to see what it was.

She was apparently clear, for when he pulled the boat inward a couple of feet she moved easily enough.

He gave her another shove, harder than before, when she floated clear with a jerk.

"I wonder what was the matter?" he thought as he jumped aboard and busied himself hoisting the sail.

The catboat darted off beautifully under the influence of a smacking breeze, and under the exhilaration of the moment he forgot all about the matter.

"It's a delightful afternoon, isn't it?" remarked Annie as Fred took his seat beside her and grasped the tiller.

"Couldn't be better if it had been made to order especially for us," he replied, heading the boat down the river.

How Moses and his accomplice, Micky, would have grinned if they could have seen those young people start on their fateful cruise; but Moses couldn't leave the store nor Micky the mine at that hour of the day.

The boat leaned to the influence of the wind, exposing a foot or so of her copper sheathing which flashed back the rays of the afternoon sunshine.

"Father said this morning that you told him you had a big offer for that pony of yours," said Annie from under her white sunshade.

"That's right. Three thousand dollars."

"Oh, my! Are you going to sell him? He's just the sweetest, dearest little thing I ever saw," she continued enthusiastically.

"No, I don't think I will—at least, not for that money."

"Is he worth more?"

"His sire is Theodolite, who once won the Brooklyn Handicap, and I don't know how many other events. He ought to turn out a winner. I consider \$5,000 nearer his figure."

"My, my!" said Annie, "you'll be a rich man some day."

"I mean to be, if I can get the money honestly."

"I'm sure you won't try to make it any other way," she answered earnestly.

"Thank you, Annie, for your good opinion of me," he said, much pleased.

"You're welcome," laughed the girl roguishly.

They were now out in the middle of the river, sailing free before a stiff breeze, yet Fred thought the boat was moving sluggishly for her.

And so she was, but the boy, of course, never once suspected the cause.

Had he glanced into the cabin the truth would instantly have become apparent, for it was now half full of water, and rising higher every moment.

But he had no occasion to do that, and so the boy and girl, chatting gaily, went on unconscious of the imminent danger facing them.

"What do you expect to do with your little farm?" asked Annie.

"Maybe I'll live there one of these days when I get married," he answered laughingly.

Their eyes met.

Annie dropped hers and blushed.

Why?

She could hardly have answered that question herself.

Perhaps there was something in Fred's eyes which she read aright.

We can't say.

"You know this is a great coal region?" she said, half questioningly.

"Well, I ought to. I've lived here long enough, while during the past year I've seen a good deal of the country with Mr. Wesley."

"Did it ever occur to you that way down somewhere, maybe hundreds of feet, under the soil of your farm, there might be coal?"

"What!" ejaculated the boy in surprise.

"Father was speaking about it the other night."

Fred made no reply.

The mere possibility of such a thing struck him dumb.

Smart, bright boy as he was, he had never thought of the matter before.

Yet such a thing was by no means an improbability.

Clover farm was in the very heart, you might say, of the Wyoming Valley coal region.

"You say your father suggested the idea?" asked Fred at length.

"Yes."

"I hardly dare hope for such a thing," he said, his voice trembling with suppressed excitement. "Why, if coal was found on my ground it would make me a rich man—or boy rather."

"That's what father said. He intended to mention the matter to you."

"I mean to speak to Mr. Wesley about it."

"I would if I was you."

They were nearing a small wooded island at that moment.

Some bright flowers growing upon it attracted Annie's attention.

She was wonderfully fond of wild flowers.

"Do you think we could stop there a few minutes," she asked eagerly. "I do love flowers, and I'd like——"



"You'd like a sample of those yonder, eh?" he said mischievously.

"I would, indeed."

"Then you shall have them. To wish for anything is equivalent to a command to me," said Fred, heading the boat toward shore.

Was it the hand of Providence which was suddenly stretched out in their behalf?

"Aren't you good!" she cried, with a look which made him very happy.

The boat grounded heavily on the little strip of shingle.

Fred ran forward, leaped ashore and secured the catboat by her painter to a small tree.

Then he assisted Annie to land and together they walked slowly toward where the flowers were growing in all their wild luxuriance.

Suddenly as they made their way through the bushes a man, wild looking and villainous, rose in front of them and barred their way.

He was clad almost in rags, and the famished glare in his eyes put one in mind of a starved hyena.

Annie screamed and started back in fear.

Fred stepped in front of her, calm and fearless, ready to protect her at any cost.

A keen glance at the stranger convinced Fred he had seen that face before, dirty as it was, and disguised by an unkempt growth of beard.

It was the face of a man he supposed was at that moment doing time in the far away penitentiary of the State.

In other words it was Jake Wyse.

Fred was so surprised that he could not find words with which to address this escaped prison-bird.

No word or hint had reached the little mining village that Jake was at liberty.

The discovery came like a shock to the boy.

"It's you, Fred King! You to whom I owe so much. You, whom I swore to kill when I got out of the place your infernal evidence sent me to! And now I've got you within reach I'll carry out my oath if I swing for it. Yes, I mean to kill you here and now."

With a scream of fury he rushed on Fred and grappled with him.

Stout and brawny as the boy was, and nervy to the backbone, he suddenly felt like a child in the infuriated man's grasp.

They went down on the earth, Wyse on top, his hand searching for a knife he had, and against which Fred could not defend himself.

Annie looked on frozen to the spot with terror.

She saw Jake draw the glittering weapon and raise his arm to drive it home into the boy's breast, and the sight broke the spell which held her.

With a cry she suddenly picked up a stone at her feet and dashed it at Jake's head.

It took effect and staggered him.

The knife dropped from his hand.

At the same time Fred gave a mighty heave and threw off the villain.

Before he could get up, however, Wyse staggered to his feet, looked about in a dazed sort of way, and then rushed off down to the beach where the catboat lay.

He tore the painter loose, pushed the boat off, and leaped on board.

Then as the craft gathered headway, he seized the tiller and headed the boat down the river.

## CHAPTER XV.

### IN WHICH THE CURTAIN FALLS ON JAKE WYSE.

Fred King had made an effort to intercept Wyse, but Jake had been too quick for him.

Now it was out of reach and the boy and girl were left on the little island to their own resources.

"What are we to do? He has taken the boat," asked Annie Marsh in dismay.

Fred bit his lip with chagrin.

Here they were, marooned as it were, in the middle of the broad Susquehanna, at a somewhat unfrequented section of the river.

How they were to get ashore, unless they signalled some passing craft, and boats were not numerous on the river that afternoon, was a poser.

In the midst of these unpleasant reflections he noticed that something was going wrong with the catboat.

"What the dickens is the matter with her?" he muttered. "It must be that Wyse can't handle her. Yet that doesn't appear to be the trouble. She seems to be settling in the water. And Jake, too, is acting like a lunatic. He has turned her shoreward. Good gracious!" he exclaimed a moment later, "she's sinking beyond a doubt."

That was a certain fact.

The catboat lurched to port, then pitched her nose forward, like a duck taking a dive, and then disappeared beneath the surface of the river, carrying Jake Wyse down with her. She was weighted down by her ballast.

Fred and Annie watched the distant bubbles and ever-increasing circles of the water with horrified surprise, but not a sign of man or boat again appeared on the wavelets of the Susquehanna.

"I'm afraid he's gone," said Fred at last. "Not but he deserved his fate, for if it hadn't been for your quickness and presence of mind, Annie, I'm sure he would have killed me with that knife."

"Don't talk about it, Fred, please don't," begged the girl. "I'll never get that scene out of my eyes as long as I live," and she sat right down in the sand and began to cry. "I don't know how I did it; but I couldn't let him murder you before my eyes. I couldn't—I couldn't."

"At any rate you saved my life, and I shall be grateful to you as long as I live," he said instinctively, putting his arm around her waist as he tried to comfort her.

She let her head drop on his shoulder as she wept afresh. And then—well, he kissed her.



He couldn't help it, could he?

They sat there a long time, until, in fact, the lengthening shadows recalled Fred to a realization again of their unfortunate situation.

"I wonder how Jake Wyse got over here from the main shore?" Fred asked himself. "He certainly didn't swim. Then he must have come in a rowboat, or perhaps a raft. Whatever it was the chances are it's here yet somewhere along the shore. I'm going to look. Come along Annie, let's take a walk."

"A walk!" she said in some surprise.

"Yes," and then he told her what he hoped to find.

She went with him readily enough, for she was as anxious as he to discover some means by which they might be enabled to leave the island.

And they were not disappointed.

A small skiff lay tied to a stake on the other side of the island.

There was a single pair of oars in it.

"Come on, Annie. It's up to me to take you across. I'm afraid it will be after dark before I can deliver you safe and sound at the cottage."

They embarked at once, Fred pulled off his coat and got down to work, and a pretty tough job he had before him.

But he knuckled to it like he did to everything he took hold of, so that the matter simply resolved itself into a question of time.

"Oh, you truants!" exclaimed Mrs. Marsh when the two young people walked into the cottage at half-past eight o'clock. "You have been making an afternoon of it. Come now, sit up to the table and have your supper."

"Don't blame us till you have heard our story," protested Fred.

"Eat your supper first, and then you can talk afterward," laughed Mrs. Marsh.

"We'll do both at the same time, mother," cried Annie, with a little hysterical laugh which drew her mother's attention. "I couldn't keep still if I was to die for it."

"Why, what happened to you? You talk as if you had met with some unpleasant adventure."

"And so we did, mother. I think, after all, Fred can tell you better than I."

And Fred, between bites, told the story of their remarkable experiences on the river; but he could give no explanation for the sinking of the catboat.

That was a mystery to him.

The report that Jake Wyse had escaped from the State prison only to meet a tragic end in the Susquehanna created considerable excitement in the mining village when the facts became generally known.

When Moses realized that he had unwittingly caused his father's death—that the trap he had set for others proved a veritable boomerang—he had a momentary spasm of remorse; but it didn't last long, for Moses never had any great love for his paternal parent.

Mr. Wesley did not blame Fred for the loss of his boat.

He took measures, however, to have her recovered.

A diver and a derrick-float were brought down from Wilkesbarre and the catboat lifted to the surface.

Wyse's body was not found on board, but the astonishing fact was developed that five augur holes had been bored through the bottom of the boat's cabin.

This explained why she had sunk.

Who had done the deed, or why it had been perpetrated, was not so easily established.

Fred, when he heard about it, recalled the sluggish movement of the catboat when they were nearing the little wooded island.

"The cabin must have been nearly full of water at that time," he said to himself. "What a lucky thing it was that Annie saw those flowers and wanted to get some of them. I'd give something to find out who bored those holes."

Then he remembered the trouble he had encountered in pushing the boat clear of the boathouse.

At the first chance he went down to the place and carefully examined the basin in which the boat floated when housed.

He discovered the cords, and pulling them out of the water found a wooden plug, weighted with a bit of old iron, attached to each.

"The fellow at the back of this job will land in the penitentiary some day," he said indignantly, "that is if he is not hanged for murder before hand."

He showed the bits of evidence to the chief engineer, and Mr. Wesley didn't waste many words in expressing his opinion of the author of the villainous deed.

He was so worked up over the matter that he sent to Wilkesbarre for a detective, to whom he offered a handsome reward if he would discover the guilty party.

Before anything developed Mr. Wesley and Fred went off on a trip to survey a section of coal land some miles from the village.

During this trip Fred recalled what Annie had said that Saturday afternoon on the river about the possibility of there being coal on his Clover farm, and he asked Mr. Wesley what he thought about it.

"It would have to be prospected, probably to a depth of many feet here and there before anything like a definite idea could be arrived at. You see, Fred, the great coal vein of the Black Diamond branches off a mile to the east of your ground. That fact, coupled with many experiments over the intervening ground, which have not been productive, rather upsets the theory that there might be coal on your property. Still you can't always tell for certain. The best of us have missed a coal deposit by a narrow margin, and the discovery has been afterward made by accident. It would be a great thing for you if coal was found on your farm."

"What would you do if you were me?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"I will consider the matter and advise you later on. It would cost you something to have the borings made under the direction of an experienced man; and in the end you might find the money had been wasted so far as results are



concerned. I don't think you can afford to go into anything like that for some years to come."

"I have a fine little colt, for which I was offered \$3,000, but I think he is worth \$5,000, as he was sired by Theodolite, the former crack."

Mr. Wesley shook his head.

"Don't sell your colt, which is a valuable asset, simply to put the money into a wild goose chase."

"I'm afraid you haven't much confidence in the presence of coal on my farm," said Fred in a disappointed tone.

"I won't say yes or no to that, my boy; but I would advise you by no means to dispose of the property until you have made some investigation of its underground possibilities. You are young yet, and you have lots of time before you. If there is coal there it won't run away. Stick to business as you are doing, and when you are in a position to make the necessary experiments then it will be time enough for you to act."

This was good advice, and Fred accepted it in the spirit in which it was given.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN WHICH FRED COMES OUT AT THE TOP.

It was Sunday and Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs had the whole day to themselves.

They had tumbled out of bed about the time most of the good people of the village were on their way to church, and after a hasty breakfast had met by previous appointment at the door of the old Dutch mill.

They intended to spend the afternoon fishing, a frequent Sunday recreation for them.

They kept their improvised poles and fishing lines, together with their bait cans, in a secluded nook of the mill, where they knew they could always put their hands on them.

After digging up a quantity of worms for bait they started off for a near-by stream.

"I seen King goin' to church this mornin' with that Marsh gal," said Micky. "He was dressed up to beat the band."

"Yah!" snarled Moses, for it was like waving a red flag before a bull to mention Fred's name to young Wyse.

"It's tough we can't get hunk on that feller," went on Gibbs. "We thought we had him dead to rights three months ago, when we took the trouble to bore them holes in that catboat, and blamed ef he didn't get off scot free."

"It ain't too late yet to do somethin'," said Moses.

"Ef we only know'd what to do."

"I'd like to drop a chunk of coal on his head," Moses remarked vindictively.

"Not much chance of doin' that."

"I'll tell you what we could do," said Moses, as if suddenly struck with an idea.

"Wot could we do?"

"You've heard about the colt of his, ain't you?"

"Yep."

"I heard a feller say he's worth \$3,000."

"I don't tink."

"He's worth money, all right, and King thinks a heap of him."

"Wot yer drivin' at?"

"S'pose we go over to Clover farm to-night and set the barn afire. The colt will be inside, and his name will be mud—see?"

"And ef we get ketched doin' it our names'll be mud, too."

"Ho! Who's to know anythin' about it? We didn't get caught for what we done to the boat, did we?"

"That's right—we didn't. Well, I'm with yer in anyt'in' that'll take that feller down, Moses."

"I'll tell yer how we'll do it."

Moses outlined his scheme, which met with Micky's approval.

They were to go to the Clover farm about midnight, crawl in through the manure hole, pile the dry hay well up around the colt's stall, and set it on fire.

They calculated not only that the colt would be burned up, but that the whole barn would be destroyed.

It was a cruel and wanton act to put in practice, but then it was quite in line with the heartless natures of the two bad boys.

They talked over the plan for some time while they fished in the stream, occasionally making a finny capture, and appeared to be tickled over the scheme.

They wouldn't have been quite so happy if they had known that every word they uttered was overheard by the Wilkesbarre detective, who had been shadowing them for the past three months in the hope of getting the evidence against them he wanted.

On account of their doubtful characters, and former open animosity to Fred King they had come under suspicion of the catboat affair.

The detectives happened to be sunning himself among the bushes that day, without any particular object on hand, when the two boys came out there to fish.

"What a pair of young villains they are!" thought the detective as he listened to their conversation. "So they're going to fire the barn on the Clover farm to-night, are they? Very good. I guess I'll treat them to a bit of surprise. It's high time their career was wound up in this section of the State."

Having got possession of their entire plan of operations the detective withdrew and went to his boarding place for dinner.

Then he made a call on Mr. Wesley.

"We must arrange to catch those young scamps in the act so as to be able to make out a clear case against them," he said to the chief engineer after he had gone over the discovery he had made beside the stream.

"I agree with you," was Mr. Wesley's reply.

The chief engineer soon after sent his gardener to hunt up Fred King.



He found him at John Marsh's.

Fred was surprised at the summons, and not particularly pleased to leave the society of Miss Annie; but he felt obliged to report, as requested, at the home of the chief engineer.

He was immediately admitted to the conference between the detective and his chief, and when he learned the particulars he was not sorry he had come.

About nine o'clock that night Mr. Wesley, Fred and the detective went out to the Clover farm.

Fred's tenant was called upon to assist in the plan arranged to capture Moses Wyse and his crony, Micky Gibbs.

At eleven the four entered the barn and concealed themselves near the stall of the valuable little colt.

They had to wait so long before anything transpired that they began to fear the young rascals had postponed the execution of their scheme.

It was half-past twelve when a noise was heard at the manure hole.

A few moments later Moses Wyse and Micky Gibbs were in the barn.

They lighted a lantern they had brought with them and looked around the place.

"All's serene," said Micky, and then they went to work.

In ten minutes they had gathered enough of the hay to suit their purpose, and nothing remained but to set fire to the pile and escape.

"Let's open that big window yonder," said Moses.

"Wot fur?" asked Micky impatiently.

"It'll make a draft and help the fire burn; besides we kin get out quicker that way."

"All right," answered Master Gibbs.

Then while one held the lantern the other opened it and took out the candle to complete their work.

At that moment a heavy hand fell on each of their shoulders.

They looked up in alarm to find themselves prisoners to the detective and Fred's tenant, and Fred and Mr. Wesley stepped out from their place of concealment and took the candle and lantern from their nerveless fingers.

"The game is up, you young rascals," said the detective sternly. "You'll have to go with me."

Moses broke down like a whipped cur, but Micky was defiant.

They were bound, tossed into a light wagon, and the whole party, with the exception of the chief engineer, drove to Wilkesbarre, where Fred made the charge and they were locked up.

Subsequently they were tried and sent to the State prison for seven years.

Fred King celebrated his nineteenth birthday by selling his colt for \$5,000 to a wealthy horseman, who believed he had got a bargain even at that figure.

A few weeks later he was still further advanced in the office of the Black Diamond colliery.

With \$5,000 in bank he became more than ever anxious to penetrate the surface of his twenty acres for signs of coal.

His capital had been reduced as he had paid off the mortgage on his farm.

He had talked the matter over many times with John Marsh as well as with the chief engineer.

While the former encouraged the project, the latter did not favor it greatly, as his experience in the neighborhood did not point to favorable results in that locality.

However, Fred finally determined to proceed, and hired a competent man to make the investigations.

It cost the boy all of \$2,000, and very many discouraging hours, before anything tangible transpired.

But in the end a big vein of coal was discovered many feet below the surface of Clover farm and the boy's financial future was assured.

The Black Diamond company made a tempting offer, more than a quarter of a million, for the property after their own experts had verified the estimated value of the coal deposit, and Fred accepted it.

Two years later, before he had quite reached his twenty-second year, Fred found himself called upon to fill the position of chief engineer for the Black Diamond Coal Company, Mr. Wesley having resigned for a more lucrative position elsewhere.

A month later he was married in the village church to Annie Marsh, to whom he had been engaged two years.

The officers and several of the directors of the Black Diamond colliery were present at the wedding, and were unanimous as to the beauty of the bride and the manly, energetic character of the bridegroom.

At the reception which followed at the Marsh cottage Fred was called on for a speech, and responded by saying, among other things, that he had now been in the coal company's employ for over eleven years, and hoped to remain for many years more.

And there were many persons present who remembered that four of those years he had passed in the slavery of the screen-room, while he was A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH.

THE END.

Read "BEATING THE BEARS; OR, THE NERVIEST BOY IN WALL STREET," which will be the next number (13) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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